CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is not, at root, about the transmission of specific bodies of knowledge and skills. Rather, it is about the development of understanding and the formation of minds and identities: minds that are robust enough and smart enough to engage with the uncertain demands of the future, whatever they may be, and identities that are attuned to the changing communities of which they are members, and able and willing to participate effectively and responsibly in their activities and thus to contribute to, and benefit from, their transformation (Wells & Claxton, 2002:78).

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the systematic presentations of literature that are relevant to the topic under study are outlined. This involves reviewing what other researchers have done on related topics.

The review of the related literature is aimed at contributing towards a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that I have identified, which will help to reduce the chances of selecting irrelevant or outdated data or information (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2007; Flick, 2009). A critical assessment of the work of other scholars served as the springboard to this study (Potter, 2009:158).

After reviewing the literature in depth, I considered the research hypotheses already formulated (Ho1, Ho2, and Ho3) in order to construct or organise the headings/themes (Mouton, 2001:91). This will enhance clarity, and the logical and sequential presentation of the final research report.

For clarity of presentation/discussion, the literature review is split into a number of subheadings:

2.2 Higher education and women in Africa
2.3 Higher education in Nigeria
2.4 Enrolment of female students in higher education
2.5 Women students' academic performance in higher education
2.6 Gender and Culture
2.7 Culture and women: an African view
2.8 Historical and political accounts of culture in Nigeria
2.9 Cultural practices in Nigeria
2.10 Summary of the literature

2.2 Higher education and women in Africa

2.2.1 Introduction and background

In this section, I trace the history of higher education in Africa. I also review the literature on the transformation of higher education in Africa vis-à-vis the integration of women in the sector.

Africa remains the poorest continent (Iyoha, 2005; World Bank, 2000). Numerous factors contribute to this situation, but arguably the main reason is the failure to assert education as a relevant and fundamental requisite for poverty alleviation. The basic problem according to Mazonde (2008) is that educational structures were formulated by colonialists who had a cultural background different from that of African countries. To solve this problem, African countries should rank education as a top priority, especially in budgetary allocations. In so doing, education systems that suit African developmental plans should be promoted, and not necessarily those that are compatible with European and colonialist structures. Mazonde (2008) notes further that years of self-governance and independence have not resulted in empowerment for Africans. Independence has apparently not helped to transcend and reshape educational philosophies and frameworks. In the opinion of Mazonde (2008), this arises, amongst other reasons, from continued economic and social ties between African countries and their former colonial masters. This suggests that African countries still look up to their colonial masters as models in

every sphere of life. To break away from these ties, African countries need to realize the extent of the social, cultural and traditional differentials which are evident between Africa and Europe/America. Also, as a necessary means towards empowerment, African countries must probe into the gains afforded by higher education for their citizens in relation to the needs of Africa. Global awareness of the gains of higher education necessitates the broadening of participation in higher education.

The debate on widening participation in education, particularly higher education, currently extends beyond national boundaries (David, 2007). Research findings, particularly in South Africa, suggest redress and transformation of African higher education as a vehicle for widening higher education participation in the continent (Boughy, 2003; Naidoo, 1998). Beyond the African continent, for instance in the USA, affirmative action previously enjoyed attention and priority; however in recent times the emphasis has moved to diversity policies (Hurtado, 2007). Despite evidence of redress and transformation in higher education policies, many African countries, being low-income countries and developing societies, have identified and recognized the influence of socio-economic constraints and enablers (Kwesiga, 2002; Quddus, 1999). Social constraints in many African countries include sanitation, health and obsolete infrastructure; while enablers include human rights, freedom and well-structured political institutions, among others. Further, countries on the African continent are now becoming more aware of the need to develop the skills of the working population – including both men and women (Hong, 2004). People are the most important resource of any given country; therefore the extent to which a country can advance in terms of development and sustainable growth depends on skills acquired by her people. And higher education is the prerequisite for developing skills, especially medium and high-level skills.

2.2.2 African higher education − a historical perspective

Higher education systems and institutions in Africa have developed during different periods − many were established at the end of the period of colonization and at the beginning of independence. Referring to the work of Teferra and Altbach (2004), higher

education institutions across Africa were established to serve as centres intended for, and responsible for the provision of technical knowledge for practical purposes.

Teferra and Altbach (2004) note further that colleges such as Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum (Sudan), Makerere Government College in Kampala (Uganda), Yaba Higher College in Lagos (Nigeria), the Princess of Wales School and College in Achimota (Ghana), and Fourah Bay College in Freetown (Sierra Leone), were created between the end of the nineteenth century and the period between the First and Second World Wars in British colonies. These institutions formed the foundation of the higher education sector in former British colonies. France established higher education institutions towards the formal end of colonization, with centres in Dakar (Senegal), Tananarive (Madagascar) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), as did the Belgians in the Congo.

Besides the institutions already mentioned, many others were established during the 1960s. This was the period when many African countries gained independence and experienced an economic boom (Mabokela, 2000). At this point in time, the colonial masters' policies on gender equality had not yet been conceptualized, even in their own countries. I suggest this may have been responsible, in part, for the gender gap in educational institutions in Africa, given the ties that continued to exist between African countries and their former colonial masters. To date, little has changed in terms of education organization and curriculum; neither have the philosophies with regard to the gender dimension changed meaningfully in education institutions ranging from primary to higher institutions of learning (Lewis, 2002).

Looking back in history, Teferra and Altbach (2004:23) write that "higher education in Africa is as old as the pyramids of Egypt, the obelisks of Ethiopia and the kingdom of Timbuktu". These authors claim that the oldest university still existing in the world today is Egypt's Al-AZhar, which was founded as, and is still a major seat of Islamic learning. Indeed, Al-AZhar is the only major higher education institution in the world that is still organized according to its original Islamic model. In contrast, all other universities in Africa and the world at large, have embraced the western model of higher education

organization. Although Africa can claim an ancient higher education tradition, the fact is that traditional institutions of higher education in Africa have all faded, following the impact of colonialism (*ibid.*:23). Based on this fact, it may be argued that African institutions of higher learning are underpinned and shaped by colonialism and its legacies, in particular a European model of higher education (Altbach & Sevaratnan, 1989; Lulat, 2003).

Colonial policies play themselves out in different ways in various African institutions of higher learning. For instance, higher education institutions in francophone – French speaking – countries are shaped predominately by the policy of assimilation (aimed at making African people become French people, that is, behaving, dressing, speaking, and doing things generally like French people); while the policy of association (involving a much more authoritarian approach to governance, and supporting indirect rule in Africa) directs and shapes higher education institutions in Anglophone – English speaking – countries. Teferra and Altbach (2004) report that Britain and France were the most dominating colonial masters and left the greatest lasting impact on African higher education, not only in terms of the organization of academe and continuing links to the metropole, but also in the language of instruction and communication.

Further, Teferra and Altbach (2004) write that colonial education policies across Africa had some common elements, including limited access, language, limited curriculum, and limited freedom. According to Mabokela (2000) colonial authorities feared widespread access to higher education; they were interested in training only limited numbers of African nationals to assist in administering the colonies. For this reason, the number of Africans from the French, Portuguese and Spanish colonies, who were sent to study overseas, was kept very small (*ibid.)*. This suggests that at the time of independence, the enrolment rates at higher education institutions both inside and outside Africa, was relatively small.

With the passing of time, enrolments in higher education institutions on the African continent have increased in number, particularly in the 21st century. In South Africa,

Mabokela (2004) writes that higher education developed along racial and ethnic lines, with separate universities for Africans, Coloured people, Indians, English-speaking white people and Afrikaans-speaking white people. On these grounds, Mabokela classifies higher education institutions in South Africa into black universities, coastline universities and rural universities. Drawing on the research of Subotzky (1997), Gwala (1988), and Christie & Collis (1984), Mabokela (2004:62) writes that "the creation of black universities fulfilled three primary goals: first to legitimate and solidify the idea of separate racial and ethnic groups promoted by the National Party government; second, to provide personnel to administer and support structures in the newly created homelands; and third, to maintain and reproduce the subordinate and economic position of black people".

In Nigeria, higher education institutions are broadly divided into three categories based on ownership and funding: federal government, state government and private institutions. All higher education institutions were established to promote national economic development. Such institutions are also expected to teach, conduct research, and promote the African heritage. For this reason, many Africa institutions of higher learning can be regarded as 'black' institutions. Unlike South Africa, universities in Nigeria were not founded on ethnic or racial lines.

As illustrated in the writings of the above authors, it is evident that the legacy of colonialism remains a cardinal factor affecting African higher education. While many countries on the African continent were regarded as being independent and sovereign states by the 1960s and thereafter, higher education on the continent is still far from attaining independence or sovereignty. This explains why the language of instruction in most African higher education institutions remains the same as that of the colonisers. This is ultimately an important and relevant factor to consider in the understanding and analysis of African higher education.

2.2.3 Transformation of African higher education: integration of women

The global move to massification, a process that has its origins from the 1960s onwards, has been one of the most significant aspects of transformation in higher education systems (Dunne & Sayed, 2002). Governments, in a variety of national contexts, have made public commitments to increase gross enrolments. This has been evident, for example, in South Africa, where calls have been made for a 40 per cent participation rate of the eligible higher education cohort (Sayed, 1998). Significantly for Sub-Saharan African countries, higher education has recently re-emerged as an important dimension in the development efforts of donor agencies (See for example, UNESCO, 1998a; ACU, 2000; DFID, 2000; World Bank, 2000a; 2000b). The massification of higher education systems has been associated with increasing access and participation for those who have traditionally been absent or excluded (Dunne & Sayed, 2002). In most contexts, "this has been realised by increasing female participation, alongside increasing access for minority groups, the disabled, mature and non-residential students" (*ibid.*:2).

Transformation is a pre-condition for achieving overall development that is 'centered' on people (Bazilli, 2010); it is aimed at eradicating class and segregation of any kind between people. Following this line of thinking, I suggest transformation is linked to widening participation in higher education. Widening participation policies link 'individual choices', 'institutional responsiveness', and 'national and universal salvation' (Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2009). Within the discourse of widening participation, the balance between the individual and the collective good is complex (Ball, 1998). Neoliberalism conceptualizes the individual as following her/his interests as an autonomous entrepreneur. This implies that women as individuals pursuing their educational 'self-interests', will enlarge economic benefits for the 'self', 'family' and society at large. Underpinning policy priorities is the assumption that macro and micro level aspirations will overlap and that governments and citizens will choose the most appropriate providers and programmes, which result in developmental strategies (Naidoo, 2006). Kenway, Bullen and Robb (2004) suggest that knowledge has become a tradeable

asset and that the production of the industrial and commercial focus is equated with future prosperity.

One major and significant aspect of transformation in African higher education is connected to the participation of women, either as academic staff or as students. In this study my emphasis is on women students. It has been documented that women's participation as students in higher education in Africa is showing an increasing trend (UNESCO, 2006; Bradley, 2000; Leathwood & Read, 2009). Despite this trend, Morley *et al*. (2009) and others note that women's enrolment rates in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world (Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2009; Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2005). Similarly the 2003/04 EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2004) claims that, in general, Sub-Saharan Africa has low enrolment rates and strong gender disparities and inequalities.

The enrolment of women students in institutions of higher learning has shown a remarkable increase following the establishment of private higher education institutions, and part-time studies in both public and private institutions (Osuji, 2001; Ngome, 2003; Aderinto, Akande & Aderinto, 2006; UNESCO, 2007; Effah & Senadza, 2008). Osuji (2001) points out that the advantage of the part-time degree course as an adult or continuing education programme, is that people continue to acquire new knowledge and skills, irrespective of their age and status. In the same vein, Fasokun (2000) asserts that no school system, however efficient, can fully prepare people for lifelong and higher educational participation in any society today. Hence, part-time degree courses in the form of continuing education are promoted within the Nigerian educational system and in many other parts of Africa (Aderinto, Akande & Aderinto, 2006), in order to reach out to those who would not otherwise enjoy the privilege of higher education, especially women. The research of Aderinto, Akande and Aderinto (2006) provides evidence of a symbiotic relationship between women's participation in higher education through a part-time degree programme, and socio-economic empowerment. I suggest that this symbiotic relationship creates an enabling condition for improvement in the enrolment rate of women students in higher education. Ngome (2003:4) observes that while there is some

improvement in the enrolment rate of female students in private higher education institutions, female representation in public institutions is still low, with only "about 30 per cent of total enrolments in the public universities".

According to Kamlongera (2007:14) "the increase of women's participation in all sectors of life is not only needed for the development of African countries – it is also crucial to ensuring that both women and men can fully exercise their rights and emancipation". Beck (1992; 2002) suggests that education, particularly higher education, should be seen as the main channel towards emancipation or liberation. In order for women to be able to meaningfully contribute to societal development and perhaps not to be seen as 'political outsiders' or 'second class citizens' (Hassim, 2005; Mabokela & Mawila, 2004), they are required to be competent in their respective field of endeavour. This will aid their emancipation and lead to advancement of the "independent woman" (Hassim, 2005:12). The emancipation of women relies on their absorption into the mainstream of society through the creation of expanded and inclusive national machinery, which opens the possibility that traditional deadlocks barring women access to power, such as higher education, need to be broken (Hassim, 2003).

Towards the end of the 20th century, countries around the world, including African countries – except for the newly-created state South Sudan – aimed to attain parity in women's participation in both the public and private spheres. The incorporation of women into public institutions, particularly the labour market, has been described as a major requirement for attaining parity between women and men in political and social life (Bradley, 2000). In addition, the same author notes that household labour is typically uncompensated; therefore participation in the labour force is an important way for women to accrue resources that can shift the balance of power between men and women. The research of Bradley (*ibid*.) shows that occupational success is highly correlated with educational attainment in both developed and developing countries; hence the incorporation of women into educational systems, particularly higher education, is widely believed to be an effective strategy for increasing gender parity in occupational structures and public spheres in general.

A higher education qualification eliminates, to some extent, one of the 'reasons' for the exclusion of women from leadership and political offices (the public sphere) in Africa. Statistics indicate that there are more women in public offices in African countries where there is a higher level of awareness of the gains provided by higher education for women by women (Kamlongera, 2007). The number of women in parliament, according to the UNDP (2009), is as follows: South Africa, 49%; Uganda, 30.9%; and Rwanda 56% (above parity, with 36% in cabinet). In Nigeria, the figures are 6.7% and 2.8% for the lower and upper houses of parliament respectively (Erinosho, 2005). Bunyi (2003) and Alele (1993) claim that African societies, being traditional with many derogatory cultural practices and ideologies about the status, capabilities and roles of women, among other factors, account for the low number of women in parliament.

Kamlongera (2007) suggests that women in leadership positions should make a concerted effort to help women understand some of the fundamental causes of gender disparity in higher education, and in so doing, younger women will be committed to different ways of envisioning their lives. Fraser (1995) observes that it was the commitment to different ways of 'seeing' that drove the intellectual and political energy of feminism. If women see issues of higher education differently from their mothers, then they will be prepared to face the challenges and obstacles that bar them from remarkable achievements. Against this background, the AHEC (2008) argues in favour of the need to increase equity and access in higher education in Africa. Its position centers on the premise that "increased access to higher education increases the capacity of the African continent to create future prosperity, improve public health, advance sustainability, and much more" (*ibid.*:14).

The call for an increase in equality and access to higher education has resulted in increases in the number of women students in higher education in Africa and beyond (World Bank 2002). The higher education sector is changing, with evidence that undergraduate students are no longer within the traditional age bracket of 18 to 25 years old and living on campuses (Mbilinyi, 2006; Corder, 2011). Both these authors maintain

that the demographic characteristics of higher education have shifted, with women constituting the fastest-growing segment in higher education institutions. Mbilinyi (2006) reveals that in recent years, 49% of adult women verses 47% of adult men are more likely to return to school after the age of 25 years. Benshoff and Lewis (1992), Hayes *et al.* (2000) and Corder (2011) show that many women enter or re-enter higher education because of their wish to complete the education pursuits they began when they were younger. A large number of them may have dropped out of school due to a number of reasons, including financial difficulties, competing responsibilities, and a lack of focus, motivation and maturity (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992).

The study by Hayes *et al.* (2000) indicates that the 21st century has brought changing social norms and roles for women, which accounts for the tremendous growth in the number of women participating in higher education globally. Similarly, Rice (2003) asserts that women's interest in higher education has grown over the years on the grounds that they consider it as an individual need to help them achieve their desire to become financially self-supporting. It is therefore no surprise that the women in Reay's (2003) study related their motivation for higher education to returns they could expect from education. Accordingly, the motivations revealed in Reay's (2003) study reflect the complexities and contradictions of reflexive modernization; and the changing role of women, where projection of the 'self' can be associated with a strong sense of commitment and the desire to 'give back' to family and society. In simple terms, this perspective points to the changing roles of women in modern societies, which in turn motivate them to seek higher education. These findings serve as a pointer to understanding women's need for higher education as a foundation for accessing and acquiring the kind of knowledge they require for their transformative roles. Furthermore, Badoo (2011) acknowledges that the influence of the Millennium Development Goal 3 is equally instrumental in understanding the transformation of higher education in Africa, especially as it concerns women.

2.2.4 Millennium Development goal 3

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

One hundred and eighty nine United Nations member states convened and adopted the Millennium Declaration in the year 2000; the meeting distilled the core goals and targets agreed to at international conferences and world summits during the 1990s. Built on the Declaration, the United Nations, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development compiled eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are interrelated and essential for the development and growth of countries (UNDP 2008). In the same year as the Millennium Summit and Declaration, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution embracing the interactions between women's empowerment, gender equality, and the peace and security agenda (*ibid.*). Together, the Millennium Declaration and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a promise and memorandum of understanding by the governments of the 189 countries to achieve social justice for all. More so, they offer a collective vision for a just and equal world (Badoo, 2011).

Since the Millennium Summit in 2000, numerous initiatives have been put in place to understand the gender equality dimensions of the MDGs. These initiatives separately and collectively noted the commitments to achieve women's emancipation. These initiatives include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by 186 member states, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, the Beijing Platform for Action, and Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 on women, peace and security, and sexual violence in conflict. In addition, government commitments to take action are illuminated in regional treaties such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and in an increasing number of national legal and constitutional gender equality guarantees (UNIFEM report 2010).

The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) has a special place among the MDGs. Not only is it a key development goal in its own right, but it is also an important means to unlocking and achieving other MDGs. According to Badoo (2011:38), improving gender equality is necessary for the achievement of all the MDGs: "acting on MDG3 has a catalytic effect on all MDGs and makes their attainment more feasible". Badoo stresses further that as governments continue to shift towards MDG-based planning, the UNDP assists them in building the institutional capacities, policies and programmes needed to achieve the MDGs. The UNDP also supports governments in monitoring and channeling the MDGs to local communities. From a gender standpoint, the UNDP works to ensure that policies, programmes and budgets respond to the needs of both women and men, while helping women to better influence and shape these policies (UNDP, 2008).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have dominated the UN development agenda since their inception. They have become the most visible expression of international commitment and a framework aimed at sustainable development; hence initiatives and policies on development and gender equality in many countries of the world are based on the MDGS. Apart from international compliance, the MDGs align with the local and national philosophies of many developing countries, especially newly independent countries or those where civil war or regimes such as apartheid have recently ended. Such countries see the MDGs as a yardstick for accessing and evaluating nation building and development. The MDGs largely correspond with states' obligations under international human rights law. Therefore, most states have existing, immediate, and binding duties regarding the issues covered by the MDGs. Despite the third goal's central tenet of gender equality and the empowerment of women, its target appears to focus more on eliminating gender disparity in primary education, than on any other level of education, in particular higher education.

Based on the above discussion, it is indeed logical to agree with Dejene (2007), that the Millennium Development Goal 3 is recognized not only as a goal in itself, but also as an essential step for achieving all other goals (Dejene, 2007). Further, and given the comments in this section, Badoo's acknowledgment that the influence of Millennium

goal 3 is equally instrumental to the understanding of transformation of higher education in Africa is noteworthy (see page 29).

2.2.5 Challenges for African higher education transformation

In an attempt to offer knowledge as a power base for women and to fully integrate women into the higher education sector, higher education should not been seen as a sole space but central to the acquisition and production of knowledge that shapes the contemporary world (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). "In African states, social institutions of higher learning are still mostly being organized according to the parameters of colonial legacies with regards to the nature of the institutions, and the criteria of access to them" (*ibid.*:9). Furthermore, there are societal factors and values, such as the pressure on girls to marry and other obstacles in educational institutions, that lead to gender disparity. Farzaneh and Moghadam (2003) and Carr (1994) note that pressure on girls to marry, a factor that causes gender disparity in Africa, is dominant in Sahelian/Islamic countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. To buttress this observation, Rathgeber (2003) points out that compared to their male counterparts, young African women in Tanzania, even with their academic achievements and potential, tend to leave school earlier to marry, in compliance with social norms. Nevertheless, the gender gap in Tanzania is narrower than in many developing countries because of its socialist legacy (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). Given global discussions on women and higher education, gender has become more integrated into the mainstream discourse on higher education in industrialized countries. However, studies on gender issues are still scarce in African countries (Morley, 2003). Morley (2003:9) found that even the more economically advanced countries, for instance, "confirm the difficulties at the policy, institutional, organisational, and micro-political level of putting in place strategies for social inclusion in higher education".

I have searched the literature from the north to south of Africa extensively, as a means of understanding the gender discourse, particularly in the context of women in higher education in Africa. From my reading, I understand that higher education in Africa

remains mostly synonymous with men. Pereira (2002:1), in her analysis of higher education in Nigeria, notes that "although the university system tends to be spoken of in gender neutral terms, the effects of their workings are far from gender neutral as shown by the proportion of women students and academics". In a study in Zimbabwe, Gaidzanwa (2007) observed a similar situation and notes that the University of Zimbabwe is an unfriendly and overtly gender-based, hostile environment for both female students and staff members. In response to the views of writers on gender neutrality in higher education institutions in Africa, Ngome (2003) admits that the situation concerning gender neutrality and male dominance is no different in Kenya. By extension to northern Africa, Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam in their work '*Empowering women, developing society: female education in the Middle East and North Africa*' show that issues relating to 'maleness' in institutions of learning remain a major challenge. According to Farzaneh and Moghadam (2003), many girls and women are still excluded from education and many of those in schools are learning too little to prepare them for the 21st century labour market.

To simplify and summarize the writings of these authors, I align my view with that of Mlama (1998; 2001), whose research focuses on gender and higher education in Africa, that higher education is overwhelmingly characterized by 'maleness'. Assie-Lumumba (2006) stresses that like many other social factors, gender does not constitute a variable that acts alone. It is indeed the interface with other socially significant factors that constitute solid obstacles to higher education for women (*ibid.*:20).

2.2.6 Women's role in higher education development in Africa

Despite the many challenges that mitigate against women's success in higher education, such as colonization legacies and the gendered dichotomy or disequilibrium of higher education, African women seek higher education passionately, realizing that it is a major means of liberating themselves (Mama & Barnes, 2007). The antecedents to the energy that women pour into Africa's educational and intellectual development are evident in the memoirs of early women educators like Charlotte Maxeke of South Africa, Constance

Cummings-John of Liberia, Mrs Ekpo and Funmilayo Kuti both of Nigeria, amongst others, who all contributed immensely towards the development of higher education across the continent (Mama & Barnes, 2007). Accordingly, Mama and Barnes reveal that in the pre-independence years (1940s-1960s) these women established educational institutions in their respective countries. These institutions included the vocational schools for young ladies set up by Constance Cummings-John on her return to Freetown (where she later became Africa's first woman mayor); Mrs Ekpo's educational initiatives for women in the Calabar area of southeast Nigeria; Funmilayo Kuti's workshops for illiterate market women; and other non-formal education initiatives carried out by African women in a spirit of charitability (Mama & Barnes, 2007).

Mama and Barnes (2007) also document that before the early 1900s, education among Muslim African women was carried out by *mallamas*, in the tradition of the 19th century scholar and teacher Nana Asma'u, daughter of Usman 'Dan Fodio (*ibid.*:2). On this note, the same authors opine that Africa's colonial-era universities began as extensions of elitist metropolitan institutions. Although Mama and Barnes were writing about universities in particular, their conclusion suggests that at no time have women been formally excluded from Africa's post-independence higher education sector, which is something women can take pride in.

It is documented that the contributions of women to the development of higher education in Africa, such as those illuminated above, carried no monetary reward (Mama & Barnes, 2007). Yet many women, in collaboration with governments, attempted to foster the transformation or development of higher education through initiatives that led to the formulation of policies favouring women's participation in higher education. For example, in South Africa, initiatives such as the Commission on Gender Equality, the National Gender Forum, and the Office on the Status of Women continue to support efforts by higher education institutions to be more inclusive and equitable (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004).

2.2.7 Conclusion

The first challenge for women in higher education is to increase access for women to higher education opportunities. Improved access to higher education is linked to the opening of increased employment possibilities and poverty reduction in Africa. In summary, women's education forms part of the fundamental requirements for poverty reduction and development of the continent. The second challenge to women's higher education on the African continent is to provide gender-fair education to all citizens. According to Banerjere (2010), gender-fair education involves an aggressive move away from an emphasis on separate and complementary spheres for men and women and gender stereotyped careers, to expanded options and outcomes. The attainment of such, in collaboration with women's emancipation as a means towards their empowerment and liberation, should not simply be an offshoot of a good education but rather an explicit, overarching goal in a healthy social environment. Although Banerjee's (2010) work entitled '*Restructuring Indian higher education: strategies for women's empowerment'* focuses on India, her findings and conclusion appear to be useful in the context of this study, especially if one considers that India is a developing country as are many countries on the African continent.

Improved higher education opportunities for women will enable them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. For women to make personal strides forward in satisfying their quest and growing need for higher education (Corder, 2011), African countries should make concerted efforts through policies which include the above-mentioned gender-fair education instruments (see Banerjere, 2010). As the literature reveals, higher education offers women the opportunity to be trained as leaders with decision making capacities to achieve the best for themselves and their countries, and to represent womenfolk in general.

2.3 Higher education in Nigeria

Nigeria is a federation of 36 states; the capital is situated in Abuja. The population of Nigeria is pegged at approximately at 137 million, making it the most populous nation in

Africa and the largest black nation in the world. The large population is one reason why higher education in the country is significant and from time to time visited by researchers from across the world. Higher education in Nigeria is inevitable given the human, natural, physical, material and other forms of resources available. It is pointless to define higher education in detail (see background to the study). However, it does makes sense to say here that higher education is that aspect of education (dissemination and receipt of knowledge) that is offered to or acquired by students after the completion of their secondary school education.

In Nigeria, higher education is generally referred to as tertiary education. This term is expanded to include universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and monotechnics. There are in addition other non-conventional higher education institutions. These are usually professional bodies known for the promotion and regulation of professionalism in certain areas of endeavour, but do not usually have a particular place or centre of their own for teaching and learning like other conventional higher education institutions (universities, polytechnics etc). Examples of non-conventional higher education institutions are the Institute of Chartered Accountants Nigeria (ICAN), the Chartered Institute of Administration (CIA), the Nigeria Institute of Management (NIM), and the Chartered Institute of Bankers (CIB).

The difference in conventional higher education lies mainly in the types of programme they run, the skill they develop, and the duration of their programmes and qualifications or certificates offered on completion of the programmes. Universities are meant for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation. Universities award degrees, and polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education develop middle-level manpower and award diplomas (ordinary national and higher national diplomas). Recently, most polytechnics have been upgraded, following the discrimination of the Higher National Diploma (HND) and the bachelor's degree from the university by employers of labour. Colleges of Education award the Nigeria Certificate of Education (NCE).

Irrespective of their classification, institutions of higher education are charged collectively with the task of attaining certain objectives. These objectives are clearly stated in the national policy on education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004:36) as the following: (1) the acquisition, development and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the survival of the individual and society; (2) the development of the intellectual capacity of the individual to understand and appreciate the environment; (3) the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills which enable individuals to develop into useful members of the community; and (4) the acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environment. In a global context, Griswold (1962), Wegner (1978) and Roosovsky (1990) note that higher education is commonly associated with at least five purposes:

- to prepare students to understand, conduct or apply research of various kinds
- to instruct students in the rational traditions and academic disciplines associated with liberal or advanced learning
- to provide vocational training that will enable students to enter the workforce, earn a living, and engage in productive and satisfying labour
- to initiate students into the study of substantive visions of the good
- to foster the dispositions and skills required for democratic citizenship

Put together, in terms of national and international perspectives, higher education is thus meant to be development oriented, whether in physical or psychological dimensions (Yaqub, 2001).

The history of higher education in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1890s when Sierra Leonean re-captives took the initiative (though unsuccessful) to establish a higher education institution by making land available somewhere between Yaba and Ebute Metta in Lagos (Fafunwa, 1975). In 1896, some individuals attempted to establish the Lagos Training and Industrial Institute but also failed. In 1934, the first institution of

higher learning, Yaba Higher College, was established. The name has, however, since been changed, as between the 1960s and the present day it became known as the Yaba College of Technology. It is still in operation as a polytechnic and awards its graduates an Ordinary National Diploma (OND) for a two-year programme plus one year's industrial attachment, and a Higher National Diploma (HND) for a four-year programme and a one-year industrial attachment programme. Today, there is a strong move from the public sector and from students and members of staff of the institution for it to be upgraded to the status of a university and the name changed to the University of Technology, Yaba.

It is pertinent to reveal that before the establishment of Yaba Higher College, some training schools and institutions had already been established. For example, schools which can now be regarded as monotechnics in Oyo State started in Lagos in 1908. Following the high dropout rate and higher numbers of Nigerians studying overseas, in 1943 the government set up a commission (the Elliot Commission) to advise on higher education needs. One major outcome was the establishment of the University College in Ibadan in 1948. The university college offered degrees to graduates jointly with the University of London on completion of their programmes. This was the only university in the country until 1960 when Nigeria gained its independence.

Independence made way for more universities because of the demand for higher education (Jubril, 2003). In addition, few people saw the need for overseas universities. This view was fuelled by increasing job opportunities for Nigerians. In 1962, the Federal Government established the University of Lagos in Lagos (then the capital city) on the recommendation of the Ashby Commission. This Commission was set up by the government in April 1959 to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-secondary school certificate and higher education over the next twenty years (1960–1980). On the recommendation of the Commission the federal government deemed it necessary to establish at least one university in each region of the federation: the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (East); the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (North); the University of Ile-Ife, Osun (West); and the University of Benin, Edo (Mid-West). This group of universities is often referred to as the first-generation universities.

In the 1970s, the petroleum boom led to an increase in the number of higher education institutions in Nigeria. In 1976, seven universities were established in the following locations: Calabar, Jos, Ilorin, Kano, Port Harcourt, Sokoto and Maiduguri. These universities are referred to as the second-generation universities. These were mainly specialised universities of technology and agriculture and consist of the Universities of Owerri, Minna, Yola, Bauchi, Akure, Abeokuta, Umudike and Makurdi. During this period, the Nigerian Military Academy was upgraded to the status of a university. Today it is known as the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), the premier military university in Nigeria.

In the 1980s, enrolment in higher education, particularly at universities across the country, rose tremendously. Existing universities could no longer admit all the prospective students and, for this reason, more higher education institutions including polytechnics and colleges of education were established by the federal and state governments. During this period, state governments prioritised the establishment of universities in their respective states to accommodate the increased numbers of students demanding higher education. Universities established during this period are referred to as third-generation universities. In recent times, the number of higher institutions of learning has increased as the government alone can no longer manage or provide higher education for all Nigerians as well as students from neighbouring countries. This has left the government of the country with no option but to give approval for the establishment of private universities.

Private individuals and Christian missionaries are at the forefront of private higher education establishments in Nigeria. Admission to all tertiary institutions in Nigeria is conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. This examination board was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1978 to conduct entrance examinations (UME) for students seeking admission into different tertiary institutions. It is important to note that the board conducts examinations for full-time studies and placement for direct-entry students only. The respective institutions conduct entry examinations for other modes of study, such as part time, distance learning and correspondence. The admission and

entrance examination requirements for all modes of study (full time, part time and distance) are uniform.

Between 2000 and 2001, Nigeria's entire tertiary education system (federal, state and private) comprised 220 institutions: 17 federal universities, four federal universities of technology, three federal universities of agriculture, one national open university, four national centres for specialised tertiary instruction, 16 state universities, seven private universities, one military university, 17 federal polytechnics, 27 state polytechnics, seven private polytechnics, 22 federal teacher training colleges, 38 state teacher training colleges, four private teacher training colleges, 36 colleges of agriculture, 12 specialised training institutes, and four parastatal supervisory agencies (NUC, 2002b). Today, Nigeria is the country with the highest number of tertiary institutions (higher education) on the African continent (NUC, 2002b; Jubril, 2003).

2.4 Enrolment of women students to higher education

Enrolment numbers is a major factor that determines access and participation of women in higher education. Women students' access in particular is determined by many factors that are mutually reinforcing. These include favourable admission policies, physical access to institutions, availability of financial resources, and prior access to secondary school education, as well as the quality of the institutional culture. Kethusigile, Kwaramba and Lopi (2000) argue that all the factors are interrelated and all affect women's enrolment and participation in higher education. Examining the interrelationship of all these factors is beyond the scope of the proposed study, nevertheless, some will be briefly examined and analysed. Kethusigile *et al*. (2000) indicate that a myriad of sociocultural, political and economic factors determine or constrain the enrolment of women in higher levels of education. The factors that influence women's access and enrolment vary across the continent. However, tradition and culture are unique and are issues that the continent will struggle with for a long time to come because of its vast traditional and cultural heritage. Cultural practice in Nigeria is

identified as a major obstacle for women students attempting to enrol in higher education (Bolarin, 2001; 2004).

Since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Jometein, Thailand, various governments, non-government organisations and United Nations agencies have committed themselves to eliminating the gender gap in children's access to primary school education. This they believe is fundamental to tackling the problem of higher education from the "grassroots". Declarations such as the one made at Jometein focused attention sharply on the importance of female education (Rufa'i 2001). This awareness is essential if human resources in Nigeria are to be optimally developed. In addition, higher education for women should not be seen as a privilege but a right. It is for this reason that gender issues and equalities have been at the forefront of international summits since 1990. Some of these summits include the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD, 1995), Copenhagen; the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW, 1995), Beijing and Beijing plus 5 (2005), New York. These summits are manifestations of the world's commitment to gender equality as it is increasingly obvious that women's enrolment and participation in education is a requirement for countries on the way to empowerment and development. Yet the call to ensure access for women to education is not enough; the goal should be considered a minimum requirement, rather than an end itself. It is impressive to see experts in seminars, summits and conferences coming up with strategies to increase the female enrolment rate in higher education, but it would be even better to see governments of countries put them into use.

In March 2002, at a national summit on higher education held to examine specific policy issues arising from the government's higher education autonomy policy, the Nigerian government took a step in the right direction. As reported, 1,200 stakeholders attended this summit including students, parents, academic staff, management, government and employers. Topics addressed included management, funding, access/enrolment, curriculum relevance and social problems (Federal Ministry of Education, 2002). Access and enrolment were debated because they are seen as a major problem by parents; to others they are a challenge that needs immediate attention given the population growth rate of the country. The issue is exacerbated by the influx of students in Higher education

in Nigeria from neighbouring countries such as Republic of Benin, Togo, Liberia, and other West African countries who have enrolled for higher education in the country (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2002).

An indicator of enrolment growth in higher institutions of learning is the high number of new intakes applying for higher education every year. Yaqub (2001) stresses that not all prospective students who qualify for higher education in Nigeria are offered admission; a large number of them are constrained by financial issues, the inability to pass the entrance examination, and insufficient facilities and classrooms for students. In the light of this, Yaqub acknowledges that two main issues are relevant to accessing higher education in Nigeria: firstly, the financial ability of the prospective student to pay their way through the system; and secondly, the extent to which they qualify academically. However, Adeyemo (2000) reveals that higher education in Nigeria, especially in institutions owned by the federal government, is about the cheapest in terms of tuition fees on the continent. Despite this, the access and enrolment of students to higher education institutions in the country is still at a low ebb in comparison with international trends.

In Africa, Nigeria boasts the largest number of higher education institutions, but South Africa has the highest number of student enrolments (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2002). A constant increase in the number of students migrating from Nigeria to other countries across the world for higher education is a major reason for this (Saint *et al.*, 2002), and can be traced back to the numerous problems in the higher education system in the past, especially during the military era. At that time, higher education was ridiculed because the military administration did not regard higher education (universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education) as valuable, but rather as a threat. Its focus was on in the Nigerian Defence Academy as a training ground for senior military officers. This could be the reason why Rtd. Brigadier General David Mark once said that the least ranked soldier is better than a university graduate (*The Punch*, 2006). This situation, as well as frequent strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP) and other academic unions, paved the way for instability in the country's education system. Following this, came the closure of

most tertiary institutions of learning for several years. Another outcome of this was a brain drain among academic staff, making it, together with other problems, impossible for most tertiary institutions of learning to admit or increase their enrolment numbers. A holistic view helps to see access and enrolment of women students in higher education institutions as something that has suffered, is suffering and will continue to suffer setbacks if drastic and continuous measures are not put in place to check them. Thus, it is imperative to take a look at the enrolment and access to higher education in recent past in order to help substantiate arguments on enrolment trends and rates especially as they concern women students in higher education. The table below show figures for enrolment in higher education in Nigeria.

Table 2.1: Male/female enrolment in tertiary institutions

Year	Male enrolment	Female enrolment	Total	Male (%)	Female (%)
1960	2,349	**196**	2545	92.30	7.70
1970	25,500	**4,500**	30,000	85.00	15.00
1980	58,056	**16,275**	74,331	78.00	21.00
1990	132,016	48,855	180,871	73.00	27.00
University enrolment figures in Nigeria by gender					
2001	26665	19101	45766	58.26	41.73
2002	54972	35797	90769	60.56	39.44
2003	31942	19903	51845	61.61	38.39
2004	59742	45415	105157	56.82	43.18
2005	69715	52777	122492	56.91	43.09

Source: Field work – Aina, Oyetaki & Oshun (2009).

Table 2.1 above shows enrolment rates and trends for male and female students in higher education from 1960, the year Nigeria gained independence to 2005. From the table, it can be seen that the percentage of female students enrolled for higher education for 1960 to 1990 was very low in comparison to their male counterparts. In a recent study, Aina *et al.* (2009), the number of women students increased from 41.73 per cent in 2001 to 43.09 per cent in 2005 (see table above). Despite the increase, there was a decrease in between the years. On the account of this, I regard the increase in women student enrolment as a 'decreasing increase'. In 2002, a decrease to 39.44 per cent from 41.73 per cent in 2001 was recorded and a further decrease to 38.39 per cent in 2003 was recorded. 2004 and

2005 record 43.18 and 43.09 per cent women enrolment increase respectively. However, given the figures in the table above, I observe that there is an infinitesimal decrease in the enrolment of women students in Nigerian Higher education. Aina *et al.* in their study – "impact of economic depression on the education of male and female undergraduates in Nigeria" (2009) aimed at investigating the current state of economic depression in Nigeria revealed interesting findings that could be useful in the understanding of recent trends of women student enrolment and likely courses. In the course of their study, an attempt was made at finding out whether or not gender status of undergraduates is affected by the economic hardship. Their findings revealed that there was no significant difference between the effect of economic hardship on male and female undergraduates in Nigeria. Also, revealed was a finding on gender discrimination. The study proved that gender discrimination in the country was not tied to the hardship, but ecosystemic thinking of the society, which the authors believe is presently decreasing with reference to tertiary institutions enrolment. In my understanding, ecosystemic thinking of the society comprises social, economical, political, religious and cultural practices.

While gender equity campaigners, scholars and writers and feminists celebrate this 'decreasing increase' in women enrolment rate in higher education, it is worthy to pin point for the purpose of the literature that enrolment of women in higher education has remarkably increased from independence till date, although fluctuating. The fluctuation in the number of women enrolment in higher education suggests that there is still a lot to be done to avoid fluctuations but persistent increase; and to attain the united nation's millennium goal on gender equity especially as it applies to higher education in Nigeria.

As I seek to understand and explain the academic performance of married women students in higher education, a look at the enrolment rate/trends is very important because I believe that an increase or equity in gender in enrolment can promote academic competition among women thereby helping to improve their academic performance. Better still, persistent increase in enrolment of women students in higher education will motivate or encourage better performance. Maslow's (1954) theory of motivation is fundamental to my belief.

In practice, however, the higher education system in Nigeria developed less rationally than anticipated. That is, there is still a gap between application for higher education admission and those offered admission (Yaqub, 2001). Application with intention to enrol in tertiary institutions of learning has grown rapidly. Enrolment growth has been the highest in the South Region, followed by the North-East Region (NUC 2002b). Even in light of the impressive remark by the National Universities Commission, about the zeal, willingness and clamour for higher education in Nigeria, the Commission emphasises that overall growth has far exceeded government policy guideline or provisions.

Prior to 1999, the state of enrolment in higher education in Nigeria was such that one out of every three persons in every home who wished to enrol for higher education was denied access. The year 1999 brought a democratically elected government to Nigeria for the first time in 15 years of military administration. With it came the political will to tackle the nation's long-standing higher education difficulties. Indeed, the Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007 introduced more policy and institutional reforms in higher education than the combined government of the previous two decades. Many believe that the present administration of Yar'Adua and Goodluck is a continuation and hope that the same policy and reforms will be kept on track if not improved upon. Most notable as regards tackling the problem of enrolment accessibility to higher education is the licensing of private tertiary institutions of learning to accommodate prospective students who are unable to gain access to or enrol at government-owned tertiary institutions of learning, and the revocation of vice-chancellors' former privilege of personally selecting 10 per cent of each year's student intake. Others include institutional audits of all tertiary institutions and associated parastatal bodies, the reconstitution of all universities' governing councils with broader representation, the exemption of higher education institution staff from public service salary scales and regulation, and a 180 per cent increase in funding applicable only to federal universities (FRN, 2001).

Today, with the development and increase in the number of private tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria, it is believed that accessibility to higher education will improve and reciprocally improve enrolment. This might be difficult to realise in the short term, as the tuition fees at these institutions are very expensive and unaffordable for most Nigerians.

In addition, private higher education institutions have yet to gain national and international recognition.

However, efforts to expand enrolment in higher education in Nigeria have not yielded tangible results in comparison with what has been obtainable in most countries of the world (Yaqub, 2001). Nevertheless, there has been a slight improvement in enrolment rates in terms of academic disciplines. The highest rates of enrolment growth occurred in science and engineering. As a result, the share of science and engineering in total enrolment rose from 54 per cent in 1989 to 59 per cent in 2000, consistent with national policy targets (NUC, 2002). Much of this expansion centred on the South-East Region, where a combined annual growth rate of 26.4 per cent in science and engineering led the nation. With particular reference to women students' enrolment in Nigerian higher education, their numbers increased in the humanities, education and science but considerably less in social science and technology (NUC, 2002).

A general review of enrolment and accessibility to higher education in Nigeria is essential, but the scope of this study infers an intensive focus on women students' enrolment in higher education with respect to trends and comparison. Ohiri-Aniche (2003) reports that, in Nigeria, women constituted only 13.5 per cent of gross enrolment numbers for ages 18 to 29 years at tertiary institutions of learning between 1993 and 1994. Suara (1999) indicates that in most African countries, the female literacy rate is disturbing and that it is always significantly lower than that of males. Akande Jadesola, the only female vice-chancellor of the Lagos State University since its inception, noted in 2001 that low enrolment for female students in higher education institutions arises from a high dropout rate as they move up the educational ladder and also when they are in the system (tertiary institutions). The dropout and completion rate of women students in higher education is a major challenge that one should not lose sight off in an attempt to understand women students' participation in higher education.

One focus of this study is women's enrolment in higher education in Nigeria. Hence, the background information on female enrolment at primary and secondary school level is of paramount importance and provides traces and links which in turn help in understanding

some of the major factors responsible for the upward, downward or stagnancy trends of enrolment rate. Furthermore, the background information serves as a necessary instrument and guide for provocative inquiry into women student's enrolment in higher education. The enrolment of female students in primary schools is encouraging and usually higher than that of secondary schools (Okebukola, 1999). The enrolment patterns so far observed are that, as females move higher up the education ladder, their number dwindles (Akande, 2001; Okeke, 2002; Bolarin, 2004). Following this, by the time they are ready to go into higher education (tertiary level of education); their numbers have declined significantly (Bolarin, 2005; 2006).

In my view, the increase in female student enrolment is arithmetical (1, 2, 3, 4 …) as opposed to the geometrical (1, 2, 4, 16 …) male students' enrolment. This concurs with observations on the above tables. For international comparison purposes, Mukangara and Koda (1997) reveal that the situation of Tanzanian women in tertiary education is slightly better than for Nigerian and Ghanaian women, with women constituting 17 per cent of all tertiary level students.

However, the gender disparity is still more pronounced at this level (higher education) than it is at the primary and secondary level (Ukoha, 2005; Okebukola, 1999; Bolarin, 2001). Mukangara and Koda (1997) argue that a gender bias in favour of men's access to higher education institutions has been naturalised. This is revealed in the limited effect that affirmative action policy has had on women's enrolment numbers. In South Africa, women's enrolment in tertiary education constitutes 47.8 per cent of total enrolment, and is amongst the highest on the continent (Statistics South Africa, 2002). This increase can be ascribed to policymakers' deliberate efforts to correct the racial and gender injustices of the past. After 1994, the doors of learning were opened to disadvantaged South African groups (blacks and women) in response to the racially exclusive and heavily male-biased policies of the past. By 2003, women constituted 53 per cent of total enrolment at higher education in South Africa (South Africa Department of education, 2003).

Despite the higher enrolments in South Africa, most women still focus on traditional female-dominated disciplines such as social work, teaching and nursing. It is envisaged that women enter these low-paying areas because they want to do so. Margolis and Fisher (2002) assert that women do not get the support for science and quantitative courses that might pique their interest in male-dominated fields like engineering and computer science hence they enter low-paying areas. Different from the view of Margolis and Fisher, Odejide (2003) reveals that no Nigerian university runs a degree in women's studies; rather, courses on women's issues are taught as part of the undergraduate programmes in certain disciplines like sociology, literature, education and psychology. He argues that the introduction of a women's studies degree programme would help increase women student enrolment in higher education.

Unterhalter (2001) and Salo (2001) strongly believe that the gender gap in enrolment rates at a tertiary level of education has been narrowed only in those countries where gender-sensitive policies have been formulated and implemented. Ukoha (2005) and Bolarin (2001; 2003; 2005; 2006) emphasise that women's enrolment in higher education would greatly improve if the current traditional and cultural practices that prevent women from having equal access to education were phased out. Policy drivers for gender equity have varied across countries. The literature reveals that It has been driven by post -militarism democratisation programmes in Nigeria (Odejide, 2003); by post -apartheid reconstruction in South Africa (de la Rey, 1998); by socialist aspiration in Tanzania and by a range of internationally backed programmes in Uganda (Gunawarden, 2003).

2.5 Women's academic performance in higher education

Student academic performance is the outcome or result of a student's study at the end of a given period. In addition, it is said to be the achievements obtained by students in relation to ability or level of understanding, representing the academic inputs in terms of skills, knowledge and technical knowhow that have been assimilated (Datar, Sturm & Magnabosco, 2004; McCarthy, Lindgren, Mengeling, Tsulikian & Engvall, 2003). It is measured or shown in grade points and class of degree. Having said that, the educational

process is complex; it makes sense to highlight that ascertaining or determining student academic performance is done through evaluation. Evaluation is often said by psychologists and test and measurement experts (e.g. Adewolu, 1998; Poplam, 2002) to be sensitive, significant and critical, and without it academic performance would be unknown. The outcome of students' evaluation largely reveals "academic performance". It is for this reason that academic performance of students is greatly relied on as an indicator for academic achievement. In other words, it is believed that it shows how much in terms of content (impacted knowledge) the students have learnt, retained, utilised and can apply in the present and in the future. In a nutshell, student academic performance, according to Cuttance (1998), is the learning outcomes of schooling in terms of the cognitive and affective outcomes that students acquire as a result of their schooling. In addition, a number of social outcomes are derived from schooling; these are socialisation and social control functions. Because the latter outcomes relate to schools as institutions, measures of them are usually described at the level of the school. This is the reason why most tertiary institutions in Nigeria award certificates on the basis of academic requirements and character worthiness.

For the purpose of clarity, the broad set of outcomes from schooling is categorised into cognitive outcomes, affective outcomes and social outcomes. I am aware, as emphasised by Cuttance (1998), that assessment of performance focuses on three types of analysis of student learning outcome data: the level of achievement of students in relation to externally established standards, the relative change over time in cohort difference in student achievement and the difference in achievement among groups of students, as well as, finally, the progress made over time by students attending school. In this case, concentration is on higher education with regard to data on the last two learning outcomes. Also, in the proposed study, the cognitive learning outcomes will be the major focus as I assess the academic performance of married women students in higher education.

With regard to the effectiveness of educational institutions and students, the cognitive learning outcome is often used because it is centred on the core curriculum of literacy and numeracy. When taking a look at the academic performance of women students in higher

education, it is of paramount importance to consider cognitive learning outcomes as a major yardstick because they involve curriculum-based knowledge and skills. To explicate, this entails the acquisition of proportional knowledge, knowledge application, higher-order problem-solving skills and the development of the capacity to construct knowledge from constituent elements and contexts; specifically, at the higher education level of science, social and human systems, technology, the arts and health. It makes sense to look at women students' academic performance from this perspective because other academic or learning outcomes depend greatly on cognitive learning outcomes (Shield, 2001).

Academic success is, without doubt, the main focus of all educational activities and has received tremendous attention from educationists across the world. However, prediction or determination of academic performance is still not clear to many people. Once again, the assessment of academic performance is a complex and by no means easy task. There are several ways in which students' academic performance in higher education is assessed. They include examinations, tests, continuous assessment tasks and projects. In Nigeria today, examinations are still the most popular mode for assessing students (Gbenu, 2004; Levine & Wang, 1983). Examinations are an educational activity that has been well organised to evaluate, test, measure and consequently evaluate the cumulative knowledge of students in their academic endeavours (Sanni, 1998; Kelly, Kelly & Clanton, 2001). Academic performance in its true context should be seen as a process, not merely a once-off situation (Freize, Francis & Hanusa, 1983). In my view, Gbenu's argument and Sanni's definition are acceptable and for this reason it makes sense to use examination reports/scores of women students studying in higher education institutions as I look at the academic performance of these students as a group.

A number of authors in the recent past (e.g. Okebukola, 1999; 2002; Makhubu, 2003) have discussed female issues in higher education. It has been reported that female students do not perform as brilliantly as male students in subjects or courses that are quantitatively oriented. It has also been revealed by a number of authors (e.g. Crowl, 1997; Poon Wai-Yee, 2000; Bolarin, 2005) that female students perform better in the arts or language-related courses.

In agreement with Poplam (2002), I am more interested and concerned with the extent of demonstrated ability in school courses as is observable in the results of semester/seasonal examinations of the students. The duration of course completion is eight semesters (four years) for those admitted through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), except for engineering, law and medicine courses, which are between five to seven years. Course completion time for those admitted for part-time studies directly by the schools is ten semesters or twelve semesters (five or six years) depending on the course of study. Courses like medicine and law are mainly full-time studies.

At this juncture, it is important to acknowledge that admission requirements for both male and female students are the same irrespective of the mode of entry, implying that no one has an advantage in this respect. Judgement of academic performance is usually based on the cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of the students. This ranges from 0 to 5, where 0 to 0.99 is a fail (could mean probation or withdrawal); 1.00 to 1.49 is a pass; 1.50 to 2.39 is third class, 2.40 to 3.49 is second class lower division; 3.50 to 4.49 is second class upper division and 4.50 to 5.00 is first class.

With the increasing number of women in higher education (Aina *et al.*, 2009) and the diversity of women students attending higher education today there is undoubtedly interest in knowing their academic performance. Mckenzie and Schweitzer (2001) write that knowing academic performance of students in higher education will make sense if the factors predicting academic performance are examined. Mckenzie and Schweitzer (2001) study was a prospective investigation of the academic, psychosocial, cognitive, and demographic predictors of academic performance of first year Australian University students. In their study, Mckenzie and Schweitzer used questionnaire and collected semesters' academic grade points for analysis. Their study identified previous academic performance of students as the most significant predictor. In other relevant literatures, Poon Wai-Yee (2002) argues that women students' academic performance in higher institutions of learning has increased in Hong Kong compared with the recent past; while Bamidele and Odusola (2006) state that the academic performance of women students in Nigeria has improved slightly. They emphasise that women students' academic performance declines as they move from one academic session to another (see tables 2.1

and 2.3 below). In common, both studies, Poo Wai-Yee (2002) and Bamidele and Odusola (2006) assert that educational support for women who are studying seem to be on the increase. Bamdele and Odunsola in the same study specifically identified parental influence and support to be a key factor in the slight improvement in the academic performance of female students in undergraduate economics programme in higher education. However, their academic performance is still very low when compared to male students in tertiary institutions of learning in Nigeria. While the reviewed studies are limited to single women students my research focus is on married women students. Bamidele and Odusola (2006) use the tables below to show the academic performance of women/female students in undergraduate economics programmes at Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria.

From the following table, it can be noted that academic performance of male students for the session is better than their female counterparts. Importantly, higher numbers of male students fall into the first class, second class (upper division) and second class (lower division) categories, while more female students are to be found in the lower levels (third class and pass category). Despite the higher number of female students in the lower categories, there are more male students on probation. Even at the impressive remark of female students on probation, the table reveals that there are more female students who withdrew or dropped out of the academic programme.

Table 2.2: Academic performance of students by level and CGPA (2002/2003 session)

Session	**Part I**		**Part II**		**Part III**		**Part IV**		**Total**	
	M	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**
First class: 4.50–5.00	4	1	3	-	-	2	-	-	7	3
Second class: (upper div.) 3.50–4.49	11	5	6	5	21	13	9	6	47	29
Second class: (lower div.) 2.50–3.49	47	23	14	13	40	16	36	11	137	63
Third class: 1.50–2.49	13	17	16	12	18	19	15	33	62	81
Pass: 1.00–1.49	14	33	6	17	11	9	14	6	45	65
0–0.099 (probation)	3	1	3	4	2	3	6	4	14	12
0–0.99 (withdrawal)	-	2	1	2	-	1	1	2	2	7
Total	92	82	49	53	92	63	81	62	314	260

Source: Bamidele and Odusola (2006)

KEY:

M = Male

F = Female

4.50 – 5.00 refer to academic grade point for first class.

3.50 – 4.49 refers to academic grade point for second class upper division.

2.50 – 3.49 refers to academic grade point for second class lower division.

1.00 – 1.49 refer to pass.

Part I indicate year 1 of study

Part II indicates year 2 of study.

Part III indicates year 3 of study

Part IV indicates year 4 of study

The table on the following page clearly indicates that 30 per cent of female students and 70 per cent of male students achieved a first class academic performance rating at the end of the academic session. While 38.16, 31.50, 50.90, and 59.09 per cent of female students made second class upper (2.1), second class lower (2.2), third class (3) and pass respectively, male students had a higher percentage except for the category of third class and pass, where 43.36 per cent and 40.91 per cent were recorded respectively. This means that male students academically performed better than female students. On aggregate, a higher percentage (54.29%) of female students failed. On the basis of the findings of tables 2.1 and 2.2, it becomes important to take a look at female students' academic performance for more than one academic session.

Table 2.3: Male and female students by class of degree (2002/2003 session)

Class of degrees	Male	Female	Total
1	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	10
2.1	47 (61.84%)	29 (38.16%)	76
2.2	137 (68.50%)	63 (31.50%)	200
3	62 (43.36%)	81 (50.90%)	143
Pass	45 (40.91%)	65 (59.09%)	110
Fail*	16 (45.71%)	19 (54.29%)	35
Total	314	260	574

Source: Bamidele and Odusola (2006)

*Note:

The figures for probation and withdrawal have been combined and classified as fail.

Table 2.4 shows the percentage conversion or extract of table 2.3 in order to interpret and analyse male and female student academic performance.

1 = First class

2.1 = Second class upper division.

2.2 = Second class lower division.

3 = Third class.

Table 2.4 reveals that neither male students nor female students made first class. This implies that the academic performance of both sexes dropped given the figures and comparing table 2.5 with tables 2.3 and 2.4. However, it is important to acknowledge that male students still dominated academic performance with reference to the number of male students that 'bag' a second class lower at the end of the two sessions. The same academic performance situation is observed in the case of third class.

Table 2.4: Graduation figures by class of degree and gender for two sessions

Class of degree	**2002/2003**		**2001/2002**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
First class	-	-	-	-
Second class (upper)	-	-	4	-
Second class (lower)	5	2	8	7
Third class	5	2	8	4
Pass	-	-	-	1
Total	10	4	20	12

Source: Bamidele and Odusola (2006).

Hard work, great motivation and support from family members and determination emanating from interest could have helped immensely in improving female academic performance. It is also possible that they learned to adjust to higher education environment by second academic session. Beck (2005) and Beck–Gernsheim (2002) stress that support from husbands and family members can help women a great deal. For instance, "release them from compulsory domestic work and help them to become liberalised" (Becks, 2005: 9). This is likely to change their attitude and behaviour

towards higher education and probably improve their academic performance. Nevertheless, AAU/FAWE (1998), Davies (1999), and Bolarin (2005) highlight the fact that, on aggregate, women's academic performance is still at a low ebb as underperformance is recorded in most disciplines, including science, engineering, social science and technology. These studies and related literature show there are many intricately related factors that make academic performance (at best) situational. The following factors affect women students' academic performance in one way or another:

- Student factors – attitudes, individual differences, physical health and readiness, and expectations (Bamidele & Odunsola, 2006; Weiner *et al*., 1983).

- Teachers/instructional/curriculum factors – teachers' attitudes to students, type of classroom, learning environment, teacher adequacy as regards professional qualifications and instructional content and presentation, use of relevant instructional material (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2004; Koetsier, 2006)

- Home, cultural and parental factors (Hontoundji, 2000; Bolarin, 2003; 2005; Poon Wai-Yee, 2004), as well as home background and cultural practices, have been found to influence students' academic performance more than the fixed material and economic conditions of society.

- Institutional factors – type of school, population, control, discipline, personnel interactions and examination or evaluation polices (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000; Odejide, 2003).

The educational research literature is replete with findings that indicate that the academic performance of women students in higher education is difficult to predict as a result of the many factors operating on it.

2.6 Gender and Culture

In this section, I engage with existing literature on the historical and political accounts of culture in relation to gender and feminism. While I do not claim to be a feminist and cannot unequivocally align myself to a feminist stance, I respond to the feminist imperative for fairness from an experiential point of view. To do this I make a tentative alignment with a liberal feminist view.

Accordingly to my understanding following the reviewed literature, feminism as a field of study began as a fundamental critique of the social world underpinning the ignorance of women's life situation and with men's dominance as its central focus. Harding (1991) asserts that feminism originated in "eighteen century England" as a social movement that promoted equality between sexes and as a system of thought that challenged mainstream science. It spread to other parts of the world and has been critiqued from various perspectives, and in particular as part of the colonisation of knowledge in the third world aided by the methods of social anthropology (Parpart, 1996).

The origins of feminism are diverse – ranging from resistance to oppressive practices in the third world, to struggles for equality in the first world (Friedman, Metelerkamp & Posel, 1987:3). Friedman *et al.* (1987) stress further that while women have fought on their own behalf for centuries all over the world, feminism as a political movement really developed in the twentieth century. Importantly, feminism has been influenced by socialist thought and practice, and anti-imperialist and nationalist struggles in the third world. Ussher (1999:99) writes that feminist scholars or researchers focus on a "critical analysis of gender relationships in research and theory … and recognition of the need for social change to improve the lives of women". This I believe is a methodological means of listening to the voices of women and attempting to respond in a way that will navigate their lives towards prosperity.

The 1960s saw the rise of movements for the liberation of women in every country in the West. Equally so, the 1960s was a "time of prosperity in the West yet a time when young people especially women challenged the capitalist value they found around them – values

such as competition, inequality and consumerism" (Friedman *et al*., 1987: 4). Friedman *et al*. assert further that they not only challenged the exploitative aspect of capitalist society, that is, aspects which led to wealth on the one hand and poverty on the other, but they also challenged associated characteristics of the capitalist society in which they lived, as well as racism and imperialist foreign policy. At that time (1960s) capitalism was undergoing transformations which affected women's roles generally. Capitalism as noticed by concerned scholars and reported by Friedman *et al*. (1987) significantly affected the role of women in the labour force. As revealed by the literature, before the 1960s during the Second World War, women were enticed into wage labour but at the end of the war they were encouraged to go back into the home to make way for men returning from the war front. The post-war period mirrored and emphasised feminised domestication, women as consumers, motherhood. The return of many women to the home after the Second World War created a new identity for women who were known and identified as working class. This created tension between the reality of women's lives and the ideal image of family life. This tension caused women to think and question their lives especially when they examined women's lives in the era prior to the Second World War, during the Second World War and after the Second World War. The actual genesis or springboard of the feminist movement can therefore be said to have been in the thinking and questioning about women's lives and experiences.

This next section focuses on understanding culture from a gender standpoint; culture as an important element of feminism, feminist theorists, and historical and political accounts of culture in Nigeria.

2.6.1 Understanding Culture from a Gender Standpoint

"Sex brought us together, but gender drove us apart"
(Barbara Smaller, 2001 adopted from cartoonbank.com)

Gender is often defined as the socio-cultural meaning attributed to the physical and biological differences between the sexes, and how such meanings are manifested both symbolically and materially in societies (Mascia-Lees & Black, 2000). Accordingly,

gender is considered to be more complex than sex. Wood (2009) writes that there is nothing a person does to acquire her or his sex; it is a classification that society makes based on genetic and biological factors and, for most people, it endures throughout their lives. On the other hand, she emphasises that gender is neither innate nor necessarily stable. It is the main point of entry into people's lives (Harrison, 2009), defined by society and expressed by individuals as they interact with others in the society (Wood 2009). For this singular reason, thinkers and inquirers of gender propose that gender changes over time. For instance, Wood pinpoints the fact that we are born male or female (sex), but we learn to act in masculine and/or feminine ways (gender). Based on this, gender is commonly described as a social construct that varies across culture, over time within a given culture, and over the course of individual life spans.

Drawing upon the understanding of culture as "fluid" (see page 64 and 69) and the stance or perspective of gender scholars above, I would say that gender is culture itself and vice versa. The basis of my opinion here is connected to the writing of Wood (2009). She says:

> … what gender means and how we express it depends on a society's values, beliefs and preferred ways of organizing collective life (*ibid*.:23). When these values and beliefs are put into action by people in any society, it is simply culture in practice (cultural practices). These practices vary from one society to another depending on their historical, political development, experience, religion and traditions etc. Built on this understanding, it is logical to say that gender grows out of cultural ideas that stipulate the social meaning and expectation of each sex (Wood, 2009:24).

Culture and its practices are assumed to be the masculine and feminine meanings that societies bestow on people either as individuals or as a group. These meanings are not stable but are expected to change with changes in age and status, thereby leading to change in roles (gender roles). For example, the roles or gender expectations of a young girl will change when she becomes a woman and further change when she gets married.

Her roles do not cease to change when she is married; they continue to change as she gives birth to children and advances in age. This situation is same for a boy growing up to become a man, a married man and a father.

Kimmel (2000a; 2005) and Spencer and Bucker (2000) articulate that gender roles and expectations are what categorises people into "real men" and "real women". Kimmel draws on the example that "real men" don't cry in public and are successful and powerful in their professional and public lives, while Spencer and Bucker exemplify "real women" as being tied to femininity. Furthermore, according to these authors, to be feminine is to be physically attractive, deferential, emotionally expressive, nurturing, and concerned with people and relationships. This suggests the rationale for linking women's roles to the home and children and the roles of men to career and providing for the family, that is, gender differentials. In line with the gender differentials illustrated above, society tends to see them – gender differentials – as normal, natural and right; therefore attempts by anyone be it man or woman to operate or behave outside these expectations are seen as a serious violation or taboo.

2.7 Culture and women: an African view

My purpose in this section is to set the tone for a deeper understanding of my data with respect to culture and its implications for women in higher education. To do this, I examine the experiences of women in Africa, with some focus on the practice of 'lobola' in South Africa. I chose 'lobola' as a symbol that epitomises a powerful cultural practice in which women's experiences of 'lobola' do not necessarily resonate with its avowed purpose. In focussing on 'lobola' I draw a distinction between the rhetoric of culture and the experiences of women with respect to culture.

2.7.1 Lobola and culture

Ratele (2007:65) writes that "culture is a non-generic, changeable and permanently incomplete system of lessons and acts we get to learn over time and use to navigate our worlds". In many studies, African women have illuminated that culture plays a dominant role in their lives and thus shapes their lives (Wilson-Tagoe, 2003; Badoe, 2005).

Importantly, women express much concern about culture as it relates to marriage (Reddy, 2011). Many young women understand "marriage as an unquestionable expectation that is embedded in culture and tradition" (Reddy, 2011:39). For this reason, many women often discuss and analyse culture from a marriage entry point of view, in particular the practice of 'lobola' or 'bride price'. "Lobola is an enduring custom that offers insight into past and present gender and power relations" (Shope, 2006:65). Mandela (1991) defines 'lobola' as 'bride price' in European lore, where the bride is converted into a sort of feudal slave purchased from her father by the husband's family.

As a means of understanding the impact or influence of culture on women with respect to 'lobola', I examine recent studies of Jude Clark, Janet Hinson Shope, Lydia Magwaza and Konjit Kifetew, among others. Clark (2006) explores how the concept 'culture' is mobilized to produce and represent women in relation to different temporalities ('then' and 'now') within the national project, and the particular constructions of 'transition' that emerge in and through such processes. Clark (2006) and Shope (2006) write that culture, as a conceptual and practical phenomenon, has conflicting meanings for women.

In Clark's (2006) study, that sought perceptions on culture from both urban and rural women in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, she reasons that contradictions displayed in women's views are to be expected, since 'culture is a changing site of contestation that is open to multiple interpretations' (i*bid*.). Her study reveals that most women are aware of restrictions placed upon them by culture. Despite this, they uphold culture as a given past that shapes their identities. One of the respondents in Clark's study noted that the dominant understanding and categorization of 'culture' as specific acts, events and objects, conceals its role as a system of meaning, one that simultaneously produces and regulates what women do and how they understand themselves. These specific acts and objects are important, but are only part of the many ways in which they (women) draw on cultural resources to understand and perform what it means to be a woman *(ibid.*:9). The narratives of participants indicate that in the lives of women, culture gains specific meaning when considered at different times ('then' and 'now'), given the apartheid and post-apartheid eras in South Africa. According to Clark (2006), when we consider together excerpts of narratives by women from rural and urban contexts, we see how they

raise certain ambivalences in articulating the link between the notion of time and the construction of identity.

Shope's (2006) study *'Lobola is here to stay: rural black women and the contradictory meanings of 'lobola' in post-apartheid South Africa'* focuses on the contradictory meanings of 'lobola' − bride price − and the internal power struggles that emerge over its interpretation and practice. She used interviews with six hundred black women in rural and urban communities in South Africa to draw findings and conclusions. Her findings reveal an increasing commodification of 'lobola' which has a tremendous influence on its meaning and process. She writes that in South Africa's rural communities, black women seek to maintain the relational facets of the tradition, but object to the ways some men appropriate the custom to maximize their own interests. Shope (2006) discusses contradictory meanings of 'lobola', noting that the practice has invited numerous doubts, with some dubbing it as a practice that is discriminatory towards women. In her study, she stresses that in the past, 'lobola' forged a relational bond among families, and as the older women in the research site recall, it celebrated the addition of the woman into the husband's family. The study depicts that women value 'lobola'; it is a symbol of respect for them. Some of the participants argued that 'lobola' acts as a woman's charter of liberty, upholding the worthiness of women. Through the negotiation of 'lobola', families are brought together and united; thus the transfer of 'lobola' creates a web of affiliations (Ansell, 2000).

Women in South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana cling to 'lobola'/bride price for the respect and dignity it confers, and for the relational interdependence it cultivates among families (see Shope, 2006; Falola, 2001; Falola & Salm, 2002). Their defence of the practice draws on the same logic invoked in the support of human rights as entrenched in the constitutions of their respective countries, that is, to uphold one's dignity as a right (Shope, 2006). In short, "while women simultaneously reaffirm the relational value of cultural practices, their potential to be full participants in post-apartheid and post-colonial African societies rests on their ability to redefine tradition in ways that expand women's opportunities and reflect their interest" (*ibid.*:71). One major exposition of the views of women concerning 'lobola' as reported by the authors mentioned above is its centrality to

marriage. It is indeed, in many African societies, the entrance point for men and women into marriage.

In an attempt to summarize the work of Shope (2006), Magwaza (2006) writes that the acclaimed value of 'lobola' is viewed differently by men and women – whilst men employ it to enforce their power, women appreciate its role in bringing families together, as well as its contribution as a base for 'appropriate' gender relations. Referring to and relying on Lydia Mugambe's (2006) study '*Rethinking culture in the face of HIV/AIDS'*, a similar but different study in East Africa, Magwaza (2006) reveals that 'lobola' is a traditional cultural practice that contributes significantly to placing women in vulnerable positions – exposing them to all forms of risk, including diseases. She asserts that 'lobola' permits polygamy in all East African cultures, that is, it allows a man to have more than one wife or partner, provided the man pays the bride price to the parents or elders of the woman's family. It then becomes difficult for the woman (and an insult for the man) to refuse to sleep with her husband. As reported (Mugambe, 2006), the women participants usually fear the threat of being returned to their parents' homes and the bride price being returned. According to the writing of Reddy (2011), they (women participants) remain in the marriage and become vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Speaking to this situation, Hey (2003:326) uses the metaphor of leaving home: the 'outsiders' within the new family risk "revealing a self that is thought stupid in the host culture and pretentious in your original culture". In effect, this perception paralyses women into remaining within the confines of the family into which they have married.

In Ethiopia, Kifetew (2006) writes about and decries women's downgraded status, particularly within the domestic sphere. In her view, the role of culture in downplaying women as 'objects', being good only for reproductive purposes, is worrisome. Hartsock (1981) considers the role of reproduction and suggests that the concept of 'production' is insufficient as a description of a woman's role as mother, domestic worker and wage earner (see Harding, 2004). Thus, for Hartsock, women's experiences in childbirth and childrearing contribute to a distinctly female way of experiencing culture and the world at large. On this note, I suggest that questioning culture is a means of allowing women's

voice(s) to be heard and a path that leads to women locating themselves in any societal or environmental site.

2.7.2 The rhetoric of culture and the experience of culture

My purpose in distinguishing between the rhetoric of culture and the experience of culture is a means toward adopting a questioning rather than an accepting/acquiescent approach to culture. Put simply, my assertion is that women's experience of cultural practices often does not resonate with the articulation of the value of such practices. In short, while agencies of power, for example, chiefs, elders and governments, may argue that cultural practices are good for the community, women's experience of such practices is not necessarily so. However, as I seek deeper understanding of the rhetoric of culture and the experience of culture, I acknowledge the multiplicity of realities and experience(s) as underpinned by the standpoints of various theorists (Harding, 2004; Arnot, 2006; Hartsock, 1981).

Culture affects women differently at different points in their lives. For instance, cultural expectations and responsibilities for women change if they are married, single mothers, aged, or divorced. This suggests that African women re-imagine themselves "as members of different groups, in several places, and being citizens of the world, all at the same time" (Ratele, 2007:66). Krijay Govender's (2001) work '*Subverting identity after 1994: the South African Indian woman as playwright'* illuminates culture as portraying the identity of people. In her work, she argues that South African Indians' constructed notions of identity are located in history and place. This indicates that the identities of people change on account of their history and place of habitation. With respect to the Indian South African woman, their culture, as well as their identity, are constantly shifting according to the political, social and economic environment. This arguably applies to all women across the world. In the words of Govender, "the so-called Indian South African woman's identity has experienced shifts in both the apartheid and post-apartheid eras" (*ibid.*:34).

In many West African countries and others where the military ruled from the 1980s to the late 1990s, the culture and identities of both men and women shifted between the pre-colonial period, the military regime, and the infant democracy era in the 2000s. During these periods, women who used to be housewives could no longer stay at home to perform domestic work, but looked for work or engaged in petty trade following the austerity measures brought about as a result of harsh economic policies favoured by military rulers (see Ezeilo, 1999; 2000). These circumstances, together with other aspects of lifestyle adjustment, such as friendly co-existence among women and men of all ethnicities and race, suggest that culture is learnt, and is fluid. To this end, it can be said that the success or failure of an individual or institution depends, to a reasonable extent, on the acceptance of the notion of a changing culture.

The writing of Mabokela (2004), and the narratives of participant(s) in her research, highlight the use of culture by societies as a political tool. A 'society's cultural symbols, performance traditions and expressive art can be used as tools through which subjugated groups exert political agency, especially when other forms of activism and movement participation are blocked' (Kuumba, 2006). These expressions of cultural politics, according to Alvarez, Dagnino & Escobar (1998), can be defined as the process enacted when sets of social actors, shaped by and embodying different cultural meanings and practices, come into conflict with each other. This definition of cultural politics assumes that meanings and practices – primarily those theorised as marginal, oppositional, minority, residual, emergent, alternative, dissident and the like, all of them conceived in relation to a given dominant cultural order, can be the source of processes that are political.

The lifestyle and achievements of women in Africa have been characterized or influenced by evolution in terms of changes from the pre-colonial, colonial, military and democracy periods in different countries. To be able to evaluate or assess the rhetoric of culture and cultural experiences of women, it is ideal that we should 'question culture'. According to Ratele (2007), 'cultivating a questioning attitude to culture is an estimable goal of critical inquiry and practice'. Questioning culture is also needed when 'subverting the closed discourse about culture that rules the worlds of women and men and is thought to be a

critical gender issue'. While I understand that questioning culture will prompt better understanding of its impact on men and women, Bodoe's (2005) work in Gambaga, Ghana, indicates that women who question culture and seek freedom for themselves are sometimes viewed as witches. Similarly, in South Africa, Shope (2006) notes that when women challenge patriarchal definitions of tradition and introduce gender equity, they are accused of 'ruining' culture. This suggests that many African men consider it 'culturally improper' for women to question culture.

Through 'culture questioning', African women are able to understand themselves, and thereafter to re-define and re-construct themselves beyond the 'clutches of state-invoked culture – as more than just women' (Wilson-Tagoe, 2003; Acker & Webber, 2006). Questioning culture is a major prerequisite for the liberation of women. This is evident in Desiree Lewis's conversation with Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (Lewis, 2002). In that conversation, it seems that Molara Ogundipe-Leslie questions cultural practices that are handed down through generations:

> We must remember that there were radical outlets for women in indigenous African cultures, and in our colonial societies, contact with Europe brought with it the inheritors of the British suffragette movements in Nigeria, while my mother, a teacher's college professor, was a practitioner of many radical ideas about women of the Victorian period. I was raised with male siblings, as well as female and male wards… (Lewis, 2002:132).

As evident in the extended quotation above, Ogundipe-Leslie is concerned about the dilution of African cultures with colonial/European cultures. Her consciousness was stirred by her mother's radical ideas aimed at challenging culture at that time, which paved the way for Molara Ogundipe-Leslie's inquisition and perhaps questioning of culture and gender politics. Later in life, with her consciousness about culture and African politics, Ogundipe-Leslie, in her book *'Recreating ourselves'* called herself a 'stiwanist', a word coined from 'stiwa' and 'womanism'. The term 'stiwanist' emanates from Ogundipe-Lesilie who basically approached life from a Marxist standpoint. It denotes a worldview in which women are given the opportunity to play an active part in

transformation (Adebayo, 1996). 'Stiwa' means 'social transformation' while 'womanism' is black centred. The term 'stiwanist' applies to someone who believes in the freedom and independence of women (*ibid.*:5). According to her, 'stiwanist' points to her position within feminism, which she defined as a "cluster of ideologies or as a movement for gender equity and democracy" (Lewis, 2002:138).

To her (Ogundipe-Leslie), 'stiwanist' is a viewpoint which serves as a rallying-point for women of African ancestry in their struggle to effectively assert their humanity in the face of the malevolent attitude of menfolk towards their self-fulfilment in life (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). Further, she suggests the need to move away from defining feminism in relation to Euro-America or elsewhere, and to locate it within the African context. Her argument is based on a genuine interest in and focus on African areas of concerns, culturally, socially and geographically. It is no surprise therefore, that her work has "consistently stressed the importance of exploring issues such as identity, culture and language in relation to gender" (Lewis, 2002:143). The works of Lewis and Ogundipe-Leslie, among other African scholars, indicate that questioning and analysing culture unveil "the complexities introduced into our cultural understandings of our identities by history, ethnicity and social stratifications…" (*ibid.*:143).

The act of questioning culture identifies the limitations and imperfections of culture and its influence on people; thus cultures that fail to acknowledge their own imperfections and limits are harmful to their members (Ratele, 2007). Concomitantly, 'questioning culture' as evident in the writing of many gender and feminist scholars, necessitated the need for shaping and re-shaping their thinking (for example, Pereira, 2002; Oyewumi, 2002; Amadiume, 1987; Odejide, 2003; Hooks, 2000). This partly explains why many radical feminist writers today consistently affirm new ways of thinking and speaking, and pursue what is 'visionary' and 'imaginative' − these new ways of thinking and speaking challenge gender and feminist scholars to transcend neo-imperial and patriarchal boundaries (Lewis, 2005). Such feminists, according to Lewis (2005), suggest that "it may be in imaginative expression that we can find the most abundant sources to resist the coercive powers of our present discursive context" (*ibid.*:76). It is therefore vital that women speak for themselves, and question for themselves. Simultaneously, as a man, it is

crucial that I too question culture, for without questioning the anxiety that my wife expressed (see page 9-10) her voice will fall on deaf ears. In summary, I realize that my silence mutes the voices of the women in my community.

As a means of consolidating the writings and views of the writers mentioned above, Ratele (2005) notes that we need to constantly distinguish a positive cultural feeling from an exclusionary 'us-only' tendency. Hence, an African feminist's questioning of culture will always be an attempt to show that the cultural world is made up of many stories, in which gendered power figures prominently alongside state, economic and racial forces (Ratele, 2007; Harding, 2004; 1993). Accordingly, such an approach shows that society does not begin and end with one's own culture, however hegemonic, and that any single individual's consciousness is only one minor part of culture. Furthermore, the ability and desire to question received views, including those of one's avowed culture, is one of the greatest gifts a culture can nourish in its members (Ratele, 2007). And, in a world that demands us to love our culture, to teach a child to approach what they get from the world with a questioning attitude sets up that child for an open, interested and productive life (*ibid.*:75). Furthermore, it relaxes restrictions around culture, and establishes conditions to allow it to flourish.

2.7.3 Conclusion

Culture is still viewed in terms of "practices and policies that are male-dominated and privilege the male way of doing things" Mabokela (2004:67). The voice of a participant in Mobokela's (2004) research study '*Walking the tightrope: the intersection of race, gender and culture in higher education*' reveals that: "Culture is very patriarchal … Women are treated as if they cannot think for themselves, yet they are expected to do all the hard work. They are the ones that maintain the family. They are usually the pillars of the community but all their hard work is not appreciated…The African community is also oppressive in terms of traditional belief systems and Christianity" *(ibid.:*68). When women challenge male interpretations of tradition, they encounter male resistance. Men cling tightly to the privileges afforded to them by patriarchal definitions of culture and

resist attempts to redefine tradition because they don't want to (Shope, 2006). Their resistance, framed as a defence against an attack on African culture (Nhlapo, 2000), exposes the close relationship between power relations and cultural practices (Yuval Davis, 1997).

This section has shown that over time, African women have persistently questioned the ways in which understandings of culture have both valued and devalued them. In summary, cultural practices, as shown in the foregoing discussion, are deeply contextualized and highly contested. As such, their transformability, through questioning, is fundamental to a better life for women, and indeed, for men.

2.8 Historical and Political Accounts of Culture in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as in other developing societies in Africa, feminist scholars and anthropologists alike write that the historical and political account of culture explains how a legacy of colonial administration, cultural nationalism and patriarchal postcolonial nation building have largely contributed to the rigidification of Africa culture (Afonja, 2005; Amadiume, 1987; Harrison, 2009; Oyewumi, 2002). This provides an explanation as to why culture is sometimes connoted to be the fixed traditions and customs of people of the same society by sociologists. Feminists view culture as a "fluid" practice, meaning that it possesses the quality of being able to change. In short, culture from the standpoint of feminists and anthropologists suggests that culture, gender and women's lives are regulated by ever-changing political agitations, movements and institutions, thereby leading to fluidity of culture. The fluidity of culture, as argued by anthropologists and feminist scholars, is supported by legislation, official myth-making and dominant ideology promoted as beneficial either by persons or institutions in male-dominant spheres. Amadiume (1987) and Oyewumi (2002) both argue, but in different times, that pre-colonial cultural practices were far more flexible and, in some cases, supported women's intellectual and political empowerment. In their respective studies, Amadiume and Oyewumi emphasise that, before colonisation, women in Nigeria enjoyed some degree of autonomy and operated autonomous institutions. Oyewumi limits her

discussion to the realities of the Yoruba tribe. For example, according to her, before colonisation women – elderly women in some communities – served as the head of the community and were known as "Baale". In addition, women's ownership of property was not seen as a problem. In an attempt to comprehend Oyewumi's argument I remember the stories of my grandfather (my mother's father) once told me about the property his mother "Inine" (meaning grandmother) owned. He also told me about the advice, assistance and contribution "Inine" gave people both old and young in her town – Kokori, one of towns of the Urhobo tribe in Delta State of Nigeria. This story, though not documented, corroborates the argument of Oyewumi. Colonisation was accompanied by the stripping off or depriving of women of the autonomy in all forms that they enjoyed prior to colonisation. Many of these women and the younger generations who were aware of these histories or were told stories like I was told saw justification in the struggle of feminists.

Both Amadiume and Oyewumi, respectively and as well as Nzegwu (2001:30–32), hold that gender was not an organising principle in African societies before colonisation, even though there might have been other forms of social inequalities. According to these authors, the systematic patriarchalisation of African societies has occurred through colonialism, the introduction of Christianity and Islam, and the process of state formation. Other scholars argue that the cultural discourses on power and empowerment run counter to colonial representation of women's access to power (Tamala, 1999; Becker, 2000). Furthermore, Amadiume and Oyewumi, from the Igbo and Yoruba tribe in Nigeria respectively, present provocative challenges to Western feminist constructions of African women and gender systems. Drawing upon historiographical, ethnohistorical and ethnographic evidence, they argue that western notions of women and gender are premised on a "bio-logic" inappropriate for understanding the gendered histories of African societies. They claim that the very notion of "woman" as a fundamental category indexing shared interests, desires, and social positions, was introduced by colonialism and the biologically determinist ideology it imposed on West African societies. The writers here are concerned with women's ownership of property in the same way as men and the equal opportunity to participate in community affairs, leadership, power and

empowerment. Given this I would say that the views expressed by these writers are aligned with liberal and Marxist feminist theorists.

Literature emanating from women of other third world or developing nations focuses on the relationship between feminism and nationalism. In *Feminism and nationalism in the third world*, Jayawardena reminds her readers that many men in the third world reject western feminism because they see it as mainly Eurocentric. She argues that given the rejection of western feminism by men, in particular in the third world, and the Eurocentric view that the women's movement is, in any case, a Western European and North American phenomenon occasionally exported to or imitated in the third world, it is necessary to show that

> … feminism is not imposed on the third world by the west, but rather that historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women, even though the impact of imperialism and Western though was admittedly among significant elements in these historical circumstance (Jayawardena, 1986:2).

Jayawardena goes on to examine the history of women's struggles in twelve Asian and Middle Eastern countries, highlighting not only the struggles and organisation which arose in response to foreign domination and the nationalist thrust, important though she says these were, but also the struggles around gender relations that preceded them and the role of great or exceptional women in the respective histories of her chosen case studies. She discusses, for example, Raden Kartini, who lived in Indonesia between 1879 and 1904 and struggled for the right to an education normally denied women; or the warrior-queen Lakashmi Bai the Rani of Jhanis, who in India during the war against the British in 1857 led her troops on horseback, indistinguishable in dress and behaviour from men and died in combat (Jayawardena, 1986:140, 78). In my interpretation, all these women stood for the cause of womanhood. For them, the promotion of women's welfare and interests, particularly through freedom from male domination and gender equality, is not limited to speaking, that is, making the voices of women heard, but can be demonstrated in the forms of action and leadership exhibited by the likes of Lakashmi Bai the Jhanis.

The historical and political accounts of culture in Nigeria, Asia and the Middle East, as reflected above, are similar given the narration and the reviewed literature. The scholars who presented the cases or happenings that led to the understanding of the feminists' struggle and different dimensions of feminism wrote from different places yet their narrations coincide. Nigeria, Asia and the Middle East are all developing nations, therefore the reviewed literature here could serve as a means of understanding the historical and political accounts or development of feminism in other developing nations, especially during and after colonisation.

2.8.1 Conclusion

Culture is made up of structures, primarily institutions, and practices that reflect and uphold a particular social order. Culture is manifested by defining certain social groups, values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behaviour as natural to cultural life; society's views of gender are reflected in and promoted by a range of social structures and practices (Wood, 2009:30). In this section, the literature reveals that every one of us, irrespective of sex, age, class, status, nationality and background, is a gendered being. As gendered beings we are therefore required to live in societies where a system of how we should live is collectively organised or structured through masculinity and femininity. On this note I subscribe to the common writings of gender scholars, anthropologists and feminists which state that gender is a significant issue in our culture because it prescribes and defines the identities of people in any given society. Therefore, understanding gender is a prerequisite for understanding culture. Similarly, gender issues are of unique importance to feminists.

The interests of the liberal feminists lie in the promotion of gender equality through vigorous advocacy or campaigning for equal opportunities for both men and women. Having said this, I am not a feminist, given my very little knowledge of feminism, but will respond to the feminist imperative for fairness from an experiential point of view. I reveal here that I align to liberal feminist views on the promotion of gender equality. I am of the same view that gender equality is achievable through equal opportunities. For me

equal educational opportunity at all levels for both men and women is a major requirement for the attainment of gender equality. This view tallies with one of the strategies suggested by liberal feminists.

For the purposes of this study I consider an approach that incorporates a liberal feminist view. However, I am aware that this approach is not well received by feminists in the developing world. Given that my feminist understanding is still in its infancy, a liberal feminist view is the one I can embrace for now.

2.9 Cultural practices in Nigeria

In this section, I seek to understand and discuss cultural practices in Nigeria. To do this, I shall:

- Identify and discuss the main types/forms of cultural practice in Nigeria.
- Identify the most pervasive cultural practices on the academic performance of married women students in Nigerian higher education.
- Summarise the section.

2.9.1 Introduction and background

“For many years in the minds of women has been dissatisfaction. This they suffer individually, difficult to voice out; not knowing that it affects a lot more of them. Within is the problem yet they struggle to do most of the domestic work: cleaning the kitchen, the sitting room, washing clothes, taking the children to school and bringing them back from school. They enjoy seeing the children playing around them; also see their husbands go to work and come back. While, they do this routine, most of them see themselves and would refer to themselves as "housewives". The major occupation then in the women world; because it was the only perfect dream of young girls growing up to be wives and

mothers; the highest ambition is to have children and a beautiful house, their only fight is to get and keep their husbands. All they did for years was just that" (Friedan, 1963).

Despite the 'expanse' of time, there is the possibility that life for some women, especially in the Nigerian society, has not change 'compared' to the lives of women Friedan describes above. From my experience as a teacher, discussions with female/women student(s) in the classroom, interactions at social gatherings or functions with other women and the views of women on national television talk shows, it appears that the major difference can be linked to their wishes or dreams. Today, most women, including young girls, no longer dream of just becoming housewives but of becoming women who can contribute to the home, while support their husbands as co-providers for the family and making their impact felt in the larger society. In fact, they dream of being career women and not just housewives, as they believe this will be more fulfilling than just being a housewife confined to the home. To make their dreams reality, they clamour for education, knowing that this is the only way. This dream is far from the reach of many women owing to certain constraints or stumbling blocks that stand their way, thereby making participation in higher education a mirage for many. These same stumbling blocks or constraints militate against the overall schooling of the ones schooling in various higher education institutions in Nigeria (Abe, 1987; Bolarin, 2004).

In this study, I am particularly concerned with the academic performance of married women students in higher education. In the past, Bolarin (2001; 2003; 2005) and Okeke (2001; 2002) identified numerous factors that affected the academic performance of female students in education. These authors argue that cultural practice is cardinal in Nigerian higher education. This links up with what I am researching: I seek to understand how these cultural practices affect women. Although Bolarin and other scholars cited above state that these practices do affect women, but their study did not focus on married women in particular. In this study I want to see the specific application of cultural practices to the academic performance of married women students in Nigerian higher education. One can explore the relationship between cultural practices, learning and academic performance at any level one chooses, from the global, to the directly interpersonal, to the single individual trying to make sense of some cultural practices.

The momentary interaction between a lecturer and a student, for instance, is imbued with influences from the classroom culture, from the culture of the subject discipline, from the school, from the community, from the nation and ultimately from the changing nature of international politics and economics, as well as from the home cultures, traditions and histories of the individual student concerned. Well and Claxton (2002) reveal that cultural practice in relation to people's traditions have a way of playing out, be it in the classroom, the school environment, the community or the society at large.

Given the centrality of issues of cultural practices to so much gender studies and policy and sociology research in education, reasonable attention has been devoted to exploring what is meant, or ought to be meant, when cultural practice is discussed. If we want to understand the extent of and ways in which cultural practices contribute to, or detract from, the promotion of women's education and their academic performance in higher education, then we need to be clear about the definition of culture, traditions and cultural practices we are using.

Culture comes from the Latin word *cultus*, meaning ritual cult of the ethos, affirmation of the bonds of society which invest with values, one's pursuits and thereby one's life (Fadeyi, 1995; Owolabi & Olatunde, 2005). Ortner (1974:72) defines culture as "the notion of human consciousness ... the products of human consciousness (i.e., systems of thought and technology), by means of which humanity attempts to assert control over nature". Beckmann and Prinsloo (2007:240) define culture as the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human works and thought characteristic of a community or population which provides them with a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality. That which is cultural and subject to human manipulation is assigned more worth than that which is natural; hence, women and women's roles are denigrated or devalued, whether "explicitly or implicitly" (Brettell & Sargent, 2005:185).

Beckmann and Prinsloo (2007) pinpoint the fact that culture includes behaviours, ideas, attitudes, values, habits, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices peculiar to a particular group of people. Culture can ordinarily be defined as a way of

doing things. Every culture has a worldview that it uses in order to evaluate its own experiences (Sobel, 1979). For Nigerians, in my understanding, this view originates in the indigenous ideas of classical West African history, supported and sustained by monarch institutions. Culture is not limited to things, events, community and environment, but can be extended to religion, tradition, sport, schooling and many more. In this study, I am concerned with the day-to-day cultural practices in the name of beliefs, norms and taboos enveloped in traditions and how they affect or influence married women students' academic performance in higher education.

Ordinarily, cultural practice can be defined as a pattern of behaviour accepted by a society. Scholastically, cultural practice has been defined in different ways and by different authors, scholars and publishers. Among these definitions is that of Fadeyi (1995) and Mbiti (1969). According to Fadeyi, cultural practice is the application to life of the totality of what is learned in the form of modes of thinking, acting and feeling by individuals as members of society. In the broadest sense, this term can apply to any culture at any time. Besides, Mbiti regards cultural practices as the traditional practices developed within specific norms, or beliefs and protected in many jurisdictions for indigenous people.

Furthermore, Fadeyi (1995) and Mbiti (1969) agree that cultural practices include religious and spiritual practices; medical treatment practices; forms of artistic expression; dietary and culinary preferences; cultural institutions; natural resources management; housing and construction practices; childcare practices, governance, leadership and conflict resolution; power relationships; and “everyday life” including household relationships. Despite the large expanse of time between the writings of Mbiti (1969) and Beckman *et al.* (2007) there appear to be a lot of commonalities in their definitions. Equally so, there is a significant difference in terms of their view and language usage. While Mbiti included and highlighted traditional practices and norms in his definition, Beckman *et al.* emphases were on the components of culture. Norms as included in the definition of Mbiti are taboos. These taboos are what make it more difficult for people to distance themselves from cultural practices. In this study, Mbiti’s definition is upheld because of its broadness. In my view, the definition encompasses all the major concepts

and the scope of cultural practices. Hence, it serves as a working definition. A look at cultural practices and women students' experiences and academic performance in institutions of higher learning is necessary and germane to my study, especially when the writings of Glele (1991) and UNESCO (1976) are considered together with the rationale for this study. Both Glele and UNESCO write that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate people from culture given their history. This is a clear case of what happens in Nigeria where my study is carried out (Falola, 2001). Accordingly, there is the myth that the traditions and cultural practices in Nigeria, as in most parts of the world, represent the pinnacle of human activities, career and achievement (Benard, 1975; Beck, 1994; Dryden, 1999). Cultural practices as norms, taboos and so on (traditions) are highly responsible for the "making and unmaking" of personhood (Brettell & Sargent, 2005; Rosaldo, 1974; Lamb, 2005). Stated differently, Okeke (2001; 2002) maintains that the future and destiny of women rest greatly on the traditions of the land. Traditional attitudes dictate that women are the physical property of their husbands and deprive them of any authority over marital issues and relations (Unifem, 2005). In a nutshell, it can be premised that womanhood is at the mercy of various cultural practices; could this be the reason why Ron Miller said that “women live in a disintegrating culture? In the words of Ron Miller (1997)

> Culture does not nourish that which is best or noblest in the human Spirit. It does not cultivate vision, imagination, or aesthetic or spiritual Sensitivity. It does not encourage gentleness, generosity, caring, or compassion. Increasingly in the late 20th century, the economic technocratic – statist world view has become a monstrous destroyer of what is loving and life-affirming in the human soul (p.6).

On account of the above, I see and would simply describe cultural practice as the fusion of culture and tradition. Using the working definition, culture is simply “everyday life”, that is, a way of life – how things are done on a daily basis, while tradition encompasses the norms, beliefs, taboos and suchlike that are embraced or respected.

According to Oriche-Aniche (1998), researchers, educators and development workers appear eager to point to tradition as the reason for African women's lack of agency and progress. Meanwhile, Bolarin (2002; 2004; 2006) and Okeke (2002) point to tradition and cultural practices as the reason for the under-representation of Nigerian women in all facets of life. Broadly speaking, cultural practice in the context of tradition has been collectively seen as a bottleneck for women in Nigeria and on the Africa continent. For example, the statement issued by a recent international summit convened to address the economic crisis in Africa show that.

> In Africa, the gender gap is even wider and the situation is more complex due to the cultural and traditional context which is anchored in beliefs, norms and practices which breed discrimination, incapabilities and feminized poverty (Conclusion of the 8th meeting of the African partnership forum, Germany, May 2007).

There is growing evidence that the number of women in Nigeria living in poverty, who are denied education and who are less equipped for peak performance in their schooling and career on account of cultural practices has increased disproportionately to that of men (Bamidele & Odunsola, 2001; Okebukola, 1999; 2000; Mukangara & Koda, 1997). Okebukola in particular states that the gender disparity is more pronounced at higher education level than at the primary and secondary levels of education. Mukangara and Koda (1997) argue that a gender bias in favour of men's access to higher education has been naturalised by culture. In a nutshell, tradition bottled in cultural practice can be blamed for Nigerian women's education and economic predicament because cultural or traditional beliefs constitute part of an ancient, unchanging way of life, not easily amenable to change in terms of the ever-changing social world that is fast being overtaken by globalisation and globalised citizenship. The reality too often is that researchers assume that the existence of tradition through cultural practices make Nigerian women incapable of acting as the authors of their lives (Oriche-Aniche, 1998). The fusion of culture and tradition seems to have blinded the "intellect and reasoning eyes and ears" of women. In fact, it has made them dogmatic; they can do very little on their own without first referring to culture and its implications or consequences. Simply

put, culture defines people and subjects them to control. As is beautifully observed and expressed by Audre Lorde (1984:45), “it is axiomatic that if we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others for their use and to our detriment”. This is what cultural practice does to women. Similarly, men in particular use cultural practices and tradition to control the thinking of women to their own advantage. This could be an explanation for Carter G Wood’s (1933:84) observation: "If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action."

Men are able to control the thinking of women because women have not been able to realise who they are; hence they have failed to define themselves for themselves against the hurdle of culture (Friedan, 1963; Collins, 1991). No wonder Pillay (2007:4) writes that to question yourself is to know yourself. She further states: "It is not surprising that men's thinking about women has not changed, and that women about women's thinking is showing little sign of change is frightening" (2007:2). In agreement with Pillay, it is this bifurcation of self, complicated by tradition or cultural practices, which is so destructive for women in general. In traditional Nigerian society, men used traditions, implementing them as cultural practices to “colonise” women, making them see themselves as inferior to men. In addition, making them see themselves as biological destined for and confined to a specific role and dependant on men. In recent times, such thinking still exists. I see this as a conspiracy against women, aimed at discouraging and preventing them from attaining equality with men in all spheres of life. For this reason, their education, especially at the higher education level, as a gateway to their success in life has not been given serious attention.

However, while some researchers and educators condemn cultural practices and regard them as “evil” in terms of women’s education, other studies (Wells & Claxton, 2002; Noble, 1998; Wong, 1988; Vogel, 1967; Davis, 1948) emphasis that tradition and culture are, in a way, helpful to students, including women who are schooling or studying cross-cultural and interdisciplinary courses at institutions of higher learning. They argue that culture plays a large role in shaping the development of individual minds, and individuals’ thoughts and deeds serve to maintain or to alter the cultural milieu. Wells and Claxton (2002) are of the opinion that, as people live, play, work and solve problems

together as husband and wife, friends, family members, relatives and community members, so their spontaneous ways of thinking, talking, acting and coexisting – the ideas that come to mind, the words they choose and the tools they make use of – embody an accumulated set of cultural values and beliefs that have been constructed and refined over the years if not generations. And, as they get things done collectively, they learn from the habits and attitude of the more experienced friends, relatives, parents, teachers and colleagues. It is through taking part in such joint activities that individual members of a society are inducted into these "ways of knowing" and take over and make their own values, skills and knowledge that are enacted in the process.

2.9.2 Types of cultural practice

In Nigeria, cultural practices vary from one ethnic group to another. These practices largely depend on the tradition of the people and perhaps blend with their religion. Nigeria is a country where different religions are practised, with Christianity, Islam and traditional worship being well established. These religions are scattered across the country, with Islam dominating in the North, Christianity dominating in the South and traditional worship cutting across the country. It is important to note that some religious beliefs are imbedded in the culture of the people, thereby reflecting in the aggregate or exact cultural practices in different parts of the country. As previously discussed, there appears to be some similarities in cultural practices across ethnic groups in Nigeria (Falola, 2001). Nevertheless, culture in Nigeria requires men and women to play different roles, as do young and older members. To be precise, very often different families, clans and lineages have their own specialised stories, songs, dances, crafts, designs and history that together form their culture. According to Glele (1991), Collins (1991) and Beatie (1982), it is thus true that culture creates a division of labour for different ages, sexes, marital status and so on. Thus one can see that members of the community or society share a set of beliefs, values, habits and practices. In the literature reviewed, I have shown that there is wide acceptance that there is a link between culture, marriage and higher education for women. In Nigeria, there are numerous cultural practices associated with marriage. These include the following:

Early childhood marriage: This can be defined as a situation where girls get married before the statutory age for marriage. The minimum age of marriage for girls, as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is 18 years. In Nigeria, the number of girls married at below 18 years is relatively high (CBN, 2000). This practice is more common among the Hausa people (Northern part of Nigeria). In Nigeria, some parents prefer to marry their daughters at an early age because they believe that girls are an economic liability. They substantiate their argument with an Asian proverb which states "bringing up girls is like watering the neighbour's garden". Early childhood marriage often involves girls being withdrawn from school and early pregnancy. Early maternity lessens the life expectancy of girls and adversely affects their health, nutrition, education and employment opportunities.

Female genital mutilation: This is sometimes referred to as female circumcision and is a practice which involves the cutting away of all or part of the external female genitalia or all other procedures involving other injury to the female genital organs (WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA. 1997:5). Female genital mutilation is a common cultural practice in many ethnic societies in Nigeria, particularly in the southern parts and rural communities (Mama, 1996; NDHS, 2003). The rationale behind this act is to reduce female promiscuity before and after marriage (OZo-Eson, 1987). In Delta State, among the Urhobo people, women must be circumcised before marriage. This is similar to what obtains in the Esan community of Edo State Nigeria. According to (OZo-Eson, 1987) young women who are mature enough for circumcision are usually not told nor have prior knowledge of the day the circumcision (operation) will take place. She further states that they are deceived and lured to the place of the operation where they are held down by their elders and forced to have the operation without any pain killers.

***Purdah*:** The word "purdah" literally refers to a curtain. Fabric is used to conceal a woman's body usually including her face. This implies a division between the male and the female domain and also the seclusion of women (Abid, 2009). According to Andrewes (2005) and Abid (2009), purdah may be considered as a cultural denomination of the English word "veil", which, besides meaning curtain and to hide or to conceal,

refers to Muslim women's head and body coverings. Purdah is symbolic of a form of religiosity that claims modesty (Abid, 2009). The practice of purdah requires the wearer of the "veil" to act in a culturally appropriate manner. In Nigeria, the practice of purdah is only found among the Hausas, the Yoruba Muslims and a few other Muslims, for example the Auchi people in South Nigeria. This cultural practice confines women to the home and denies women socialisation, educational opportunity and economic participation.

Son preference: The practice of son preference is the preferential treatment by parents of male children. This often manifests itself in the neglect, deprivation or discriminatory treatment of girls to the detriment of their physical and mental health. In traditional Nigerian society, son preference is perpetuated by the traditional role of men in agriculture and as property owners. According to United Nations (1994), son preference manifests itself in a number of ways, all of which have negative repercussions for girls and women. The United Nations reveals that discriminatory treatment of girls and women can arise in different areas, which include the following:

> *Education:* Families with higher income may send both boys and girls to school, but low income families choose to send the boy rather than the girl.
>
> *Family nutrition*: Girls will be breastfed for a shorter period than boys in order to hasten conception to produce a boy. In families where food is scare, the most nutritious food is reserved for boys and men.

2.9.3 Other cultural practices

Apart from the cultural practices discussed in the previous section, there are numerous other cultural practices in Nigeria that affect women socially, economically and politically, and in their general life style. These cultural practices include the following:

2.9.3.1 40 days stay at home for post-natal women

This practice compels women who have given birth to stay at home for 40 days after delivery. This is to ensure that they are given adequate care. During this period, the woman's mother or mother-in-law comes to stay with her and helps her with domestic work and takes care of the new baby, especially bathing the baby.

2.9.3.2 Widowhood practices

Widowhood is the state or period of being a widow or widower. When the husband dies, the wife is referred to as a widow. When the woman or wife dies, the husband is known as a widower. A survey in the United States of America reveals that widowhood is more common among women than men (Smith, 2003). A similar situation exists in Nigeria, according to the CBN (2000) survey and the World's Women (2000). In a study in Imo state, Nigeria, interviews and discussions were held with traditional rulers, leaders of women's organisations and widows. Five factors that impact on the health and economic status of widows were identified: a long period of incarceration during mourning; an obligatory poor standard of hygiene; deprivation of the husband's property and maltreatment by his relatives; the enforcement of persistent wailing; and the practice of demanding that a widow sit in the same room with her husband's body until burial (WHO, 1998). The death of a husband or spouse often means not just the loss of a life companion but also the end of a whole way of life (Benokraitis, 2005:506; Smith, 2003). Benokraitis emphasises that unfamiliar tasks – managing finances, cooking meals, fixing the faucet – suddenly fall on the surviving spouse. Cultural practice in Nigeria strongly supports the woman remaining a widow after the death of her husband in order to take care of the children. Besides, many women feel comfortable remaining a widow because of the love that existed between them and their deceased husband, finding it difficult to transfer their love to someone else. In the practice of widowhood as it applied to women, a woman is not seen in the public for months after the husband dies. According to Agnes Ushang Ingwu, a feminist and advocate of women's empowerment and liberation in the Bette community, Cross river state in Nigeria, widowhood in reference to community's mourning laws requires women to stay in seclusion for six to 12 months (it was originally up to two years). During this period the woman wears only black clothes. Widowed men

and women exhibit depressive symptoms such as sadness, insomnia, appetite loss, weight loss and self-dissatisfaction. Some longitudinal studies report that men and women experience similar physical and emotional difficulties initially and, with time, do not differ much in their ability to cope with the loss of a spouse (Brubaker, 1991; Van Baarsen & Van Groenou, 2001).

2.9.3.3 Wife inheritance practice

This is a cultural practice that entails a brother or relative of the deceased marrying the widow to sustain and carry on the family name. The practice is very popular among many ethnic groups in Nigeria. Bond (2005) testifies that wife inheritance is not only limited to one country in Africa but is common to many countries in Africa. According to her, the practice is known as *chokolo* in Malawi; in Ngoni, Ndebele and Zuhi it is called *ukungena*. While in Shona it is called *kugara nhaka*.

2.9.3.4 Wife beating

Nigerian culture and tradition tolerate wife beating as long as the wife is not beaten by a stranger. In other words the husband is free to beat his wife. The Nigerian penal code of the North supports wife beating. According to this penal code a wife can be beaten with "a stick not bigger than the husband's thumb" (cited in OZo-Eson, 2008). On the other hand, as noted by Okojie (1960), culture and tradition forbid women to hit their husbands if in a fight. In Urhobo land, in the event of a fight between a husband and wife, the wife is not expected to hit the man. If she does and the man falls to the ground in the course of the fight, the wife is sent back to her parent's home. To come back to the house or to be reconciled requires the presence of elderly people and family members. Also the woman (wife) has to buy/kill a goat for sacrifice and to appeal to the gods of the land.

2.9.4 Marriage in Nigeria

Marriage itself can be regarded as a major cultural practice in Nigeria. As in Ghana, marriage in Nigeria is seen as requisite life stage, rather than an option, and it remains the

most important social institution and a major cultural practice (Salm & Falola, 2002:133). Cultural practice in Nigeria mandates marriage for men and women. It is only when people are married that they can be said to be "responsible" in society. Defined broadly, marriage is a socially approved mating relationship that is expected to be stable and enduring (Benokraitis, 2005). Marriage is a critical rite of passage for both men and women, but the effect of this rite on the two sexes is very different (Watson, 2005).

The forms of marriage vary within the different groups in Nigeria because the members of a society construct its norms or culturally defined rules for behaviour. Norms that define marriage include formal laws and traditional and religious doctrines. According to Bierstedt (1957), norms refer to ways of "doing" as opposed to ways of "thinking". Marriage in Nigeria is therefore synonymous with the existence of norms, although one is seldom aware of them until they are violated or until an attempt is made to enter a new environment where one is trying to establish oneself. This ties up with the point made earlier that culture is responsible for the "making or unmaking" of people especially women. Women cherish marriage more in Nigeria (CBN, 2000) and thus put in much to sustain it. It is quite interesting to know as I have observed that the success of marriage and other forms of cultural practice depend on the role women play; they are instrumental in conceiving, practising and sustaining cultural practices yet they are the most affected by them.

Culturally, marriage in Nigeria takes place only when the dowry has been paid. In other words, there is no marriage without the payment of dowry. This is therefore the starting point and a compulsory requirement for marriage. Dowry is a socially legitimised payment normally given by the groom's family to the bride's family and is the same as bride price. Mandela (1991) refers to bride price as '*lobola*', and defines it as bride price in European lore, where the "bride" is converted into a sort of feudal slave purchased from the father by the husband's family. In Nigeria, dowry usually takes the form of money. The amount payable as dowry varies from one ethnic group to another. Some families and ethnic groups use the level of a woman's education as a parameter for determining dowry. The practice of using women's education for 'hiking' dowry is dominant among the Ibos in the eastern part of Nigeria.

Despite some cultural variations, marriage in most western industrialised countries and on the African continent of which Nigeria is part has some common characteristics (Benocraits, 2005; Lamb, 2005). In sum, married couples are expected to share economic responsibilities, to engage in sexual activity with their spouses, and to bear and raise children. However, this is not true for many parts of the world because marriage is seen to be female dependence on men – both social and economic (Mandela, 1991). This certainly pertains to Nigeria and many other countries in Africa where cultural practices paint marriage for women as economic dependence on men and agree on the issue of child bearing and raising and the continuation of the family from generation to generation (Falola, 1999; 2001; Falola & Salm, 2002). Falola (2001) emphasises that cultural practices associated with marriage in all parts of Nigeria view the raising of children, especially in the context of taking care of them (domestically), to be solely the woman's job. These beliefs and practices have helped to confine many Nigerian women to the home and to exclude them from involvement in society.

2.9.5 Feminised domestication

Feminised domestication is coined from the words “feminine” and “domestic”. Literally, “feminine” is described as any institution(s) or person having the qualities or appearance considered to be typical of women and “domestic” as a term that connects people or persons to the home or family – a servant who works in the house. In this study, the view of Rosaldo (1974) is upheld, given her broad view on feminised domestication and its relevancy to Nigerian society. By feminised domestication Rosaldo means “those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children”. She argues that women are associated with a “domestic orientation”, while men are primarily associated with extra-domestic, political and military spheres of activity. In my opinion, feminised domestication restricts domestic work to women. Aina (1998) and Chodorow (1974), who also wrote essays on women, culture and society, both insist that women’s domestic orientation is structurally and culturally constructed and “ insofar as woman is universally defined in terms of largely

maternal and domestic role, we can account for her universal subordination"(Rosaldo, 1974:7).

Feminised domestication comprises domestic activities such as cooking, washing, cleaning the home, bathing and dressing the children for school, among many others tasks. Feminised domestication is a prevailing cultural practice that instils in women the belief that they are solely responsible for all domestic work in the home (Silberschmidt, 1999). In this culture, women are made to believe that it is not proper for their husbands to do such work. For instance, in Nigeria, married men are prevented from entering the kitchen to prepare food for themselves. Their wives must prepare and have their food ready at all time; wash their clothes and those of the children. Domestic activities for women are highly demanding and time consuming. Feminised domestication keeps women busy at all times within the home and does not allow them do anything personal for themselves Benokraitis (2005) and Haese & Kirsten (2002) emphasise that domestic work confines women to the home; denies many paid employment; jeopardises their ambitions for further education or continuing schooling for those who drop out of school; and denies them empowerment and self-actualisation.

Furthermore, feminised domestication is a core cultural practice in Nigeria which largely determines the success of a women's marriage (Asiyanbola, 2005). It adds to the value or worth of women whether married or not if embraced. It is for this reason that mothers inculcate in their girl child early in life the concept and practice of domestication. By this, the girl child is expected by her mother to master the art of sweeping, cleaning, washing, bathing her younger siblings and cooking. She is made to believe that her success and happiness in life depend on how effectively and efficiently she can manage her home. The father's house is simply seen as her father's house and not her home – she gets a home of her own only when she is married and then she can be regarded as a true, responsible woman.

Chodorow (1974) developed a theory linking adult sex role behaviour to the fact that children's early involvement is with their female parent. Chodorow contends that girls are integrated through ties with female kin into the world of domestic work. Age and sex,

rather than achievement, may define their status, while boys must "learn" to be men. Unlike girls, boys have few responsibilities in childhood and are free to establish peer groups that create "public" ties. To become an adult male a boy is often obliged to dissociate himself from the home and from female kin but for a girl to become a woman she is made to associate herself with the home and to master domestic work (Oyebola, 2004).

Womanhood and domestication are so culturally integrated that it is apparently impossible to remove domestication from Nigerian women in respect of their family, age, educational background and civilisation. Moran's study of civilised women (1990) explores the historical beginnings and present-day construction of the category "civilised" which confines educated women among the Glebo of south-eastern Liberia to a "domestic sphere". Brettel and Sargent (2005) reveal that the dichotomy between "civilised" and "native" (or even tribal or country) is a result of missionisation and has created a status hierarchy differentially applied to men and to women. Men once educated and with a history of paid wage work, never lose their status as "civilised", while women, even though married to "a civilised man," may lose their status if they do not dress correctly, keep house in specific ways and refrain from farming and marketing (p.91).

The above is no different from what exists in Nigeria, where many if not all see domestication as a compulsory task for women. It is upon this belief of imbibed feminised domestication that girls or young women are recruited and employed by civilised and aging women to their households to assist and possibly carry out the more elaborate household routines and to train their daughters to become competent in domestication.

While I affirm that the above is not an exhaustive descriptive of cultural practices in Nigeria, I have highlighted those that are most dominant across the country.

2.9.6 Conclusion

In response to and in order to tackle the problems women face as a result of cultural practices, the Nigerian government formulated a national policy on women, which was

approved by the 1999 democratic administration. The policy is an attempt to incorporate women fully into national development as "equal partners", decision makers and beneficiaries of Nigeria, through the removal of gender-based inequalities. The policy aspires to the inclusion of women in all spheres of life, including education, health care, employment, agriculture, industry, environment, social services, legal justice and so forth. It aspires to eliminate the negative aspects of Nigerian culture, which serve only to harm women, and to challenge the patriarchal status quo. Tangible evidence of any improvement is slow to appear. Few would argue that the development of women in Nigeria – in particular the status and participation of women in education and other sectors – has shown little improvement (Akande, 2001; Kethusigile *et al.* 2000). While, Kethusigile *et al.* argue that cultural practices combined with other factors – social, economic and political – affect women student's participation in higher education, Akande Jadesola, the first and only female vice-chancellor of the Lagos State University, notes that even as female students' participation improves in higher education, the number decreases as they move up the educational ladder. In my opinion, the cultural practices attached to marriage establish that women should and can only exist for and through their husband and children.

Chizea (1993) writes that over the generations, society has conned women into believing that they were created only to be the disposable vassals of humanity and they have been conditioned to believe that a woman is only worthy when she is owned by a man as a daughter, wife or mother. The first is a consequence of her birth, but the second and third are the status she must attain before she can claim to have lived a "useful life". Chizea (1993) summarises the plight of the woman as follows:

> She is made to understand that there must be a significant man in her life as father, husband or son before she can have rights and privileges … she cannot own property because she is a property herself of her father, who gives her first identity and who will give her out in marriage. And until that time she must be obedient to him as an absolute lord and master. On being given away to another man as a

> wife, she acquires a new absolute lord and master whom she must obey until death do them part (p. 23).

The above plight is experienced by women as a result of the cultural practices attached to marriage and the quote aptly describes the fate of the Nigerian woman. Despite the effort of the Nigerian government by means of policy and women's empowerment campaigns towards the eradication or minimisation of women's repression in relation to cultural practices, no significant success has been achieved especially in the context of the limitations and restrictions that cultural practice impose on the roles and general life style of women.

My experience, together with the existing literature, aids a reasonable understanding of cultural practices in Nigeria. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that as a male and relatively new to marriage, I may not have an intimate knowledge of the cultural practices that work so negatively on women. I suggest that the data collect during this study will help to reveal cultural practices not accounted for in the reviewed literature.

2.10 Summary of the literature

The literature is largely in agreement that academic performance favours male students and that it is discouraging for women students on aggregate in higher education (Okebukola, 1999; 2002; Makhubu, 2003; Poon Wai-Yee, 2000; Bolarin, 2003, 2005). However, the scholarship on women students shows that their performance is tied to multi-attributional factors, both in the short term and the long term. These are classified as internal and external factors. In other words, they are controllable and uncontrollable factors. These attributes or factors have varying impacts on different categories of women student (married and single) and therefore account for differentials in academic performance. This differentiation is crucial, especially in the light of my own experience and the existing literature, for improving married women students' academic performance in higher education.

To a large extent, the literature reveals that uncontrollable factors, such as culture, affect women students' performance and enrolment more than they do males, especially in Africa where cultural practices and traditional beliefs and customs are still very dominant (Bolarin, 2002; 2003; 2005; Ukoha, 2005). Intellectually, most scholars argue that cultural practice is a cardinal problem linked to the academic performance of women and as a result jeopardises their empowerment potential and liberation (Beck, 1999; 2002; 2005; Bamidele & Odunsola, 2006; Aikenhead, 1997).

Apart from checks on and the eradication of cultural practices that impede women's academic performance and participation in higher education, various authors and publication (Unterhalter, 2004; Salo, 2001; Mukangare & Koda, 1997) believe that policy makers could come to the rescue of higher education for women with gender-sensitive policies. The use of gender-sensitive policies have proven to be helpful in encouraging and promoting higher education for women in countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom (Lips, 1999; Jamil, 2000).

Interestingly, the literature reveals that the participation and academic performance of women students can be enhanced if degree courses in women's studies are introduced in higher education; similarly, courses meant for women only should be established in countries on the Africa continent as has been done in developed countries. The literature also establishes the premise that performance perceptions are important determinants of behaviour and hence are related. In other works, examination scores or results are said to the best and most common means of evaluating academic performance in institutions of learning (Gbenu, 2004; Kelly, Kelly &Clanton, 2001; Levine & Wang, 1983).

Lastly, there has been no focused study on academic performance, cultural practices and married women students in Nigerian. Much of the 'knowledge' in this area is intuitive and experiential. To this end the literature reveals that culture and gender are significant means to the understanding of women's lives and experiences given the perspectives of gender scholars and feminists. In the light of this, the literature reveals that culture and gender are important elements of feminism.