

HIGHER EDUCATION AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN WOMEN -
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2021

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ABSTRACT

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Nigerian women experience different shades of ill-treatment because of what Ogbu (1981) calls cultural tasks in human competence. This is because Nigerian society is male-centered. The sociocultural challenges experienced by these women were mostly from their childhood upbringing where there is a male-child preference, gender disparity in domestic chores, the gendered purpose of education, and career choice. With educational aspiration toward higher education, most Nigerian female participants in my study overcame the cultural beliefs that subsumed them under male dominance. Most of these women have also achieved their identity and have worked toward self-actualization because of their educational attainment. This study, therefore, explores the various sociocultural challenges Nigerian women face and how higher education has helped them to build their identity.

Ogbu's cultural-ecological perspective and Erikson's psychosocial development serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Based on the interview conducted with 19 female Nigerians who shared their lived experiences, the study revealed that each child grew in a complex interconnected ecosystem with culture constantly evolving in the thoughts and actions of an individual (Greene, 1994). The importance of the environment explained the various biased treatment female Nigerians encounter because most participants referred to their environment as the key factor that shaped them.

Five major themes and sub-themes were identified. The first theme explored how upbringing and home environment affected the participants. The second theme entailed the importance of higher education in empowering females. The third theme exposed the various

challenges Nigerian females encountered and how they overcame those challenges for their career inspiration. The fourth theme reflected identity development through education and the last theme was concerned with the overarching themes of culture and gender stigma in Nigerian society.

Based on the themes and discussion of findings, it was suggested that all forms of gender disparity should be avoided in the home. This will help in the development of hope and drive good self-esteem in females. Training the child to believe in herself from home would help in the ego identity and integrity of the child as an older adult (Erikson, 1963). The limitation of this study was access to unschooled but successful Nigerian females.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Culture, Cultural task, Identity, Cultural-Ecological Theory, Theory of Psychosocial Development, Education, Schooling.

To Ateeyah: Your presence fanned my flame of feminine power and strength in all ramifications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to express my special gratitude to my thesis committee members: Dr. Bang, Dr. Frey, and Dr. Booth for their support throughout the research and writing process of this thesis. I am sincerely grateful for the prompt feedback and the grooming to be a better academic writer. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Hyeyoung Bang, my thesis advisor, for her advice, direction, thoroughness, and encouragement not only during the research process but also throughout my master's program. Without Dr. Bang's reassurance in my first year as her graduate assistant and EDFI 6750 class that I took as her student, I do not think I would have gone further with this topic. The myriad of critical questions from Dr. Bang was very useful to complete this thesis.

I am immensely grateful to Dr. Christopher Frey for his patience in taking me through the writing process. I appreciate his mentorship, encouragement, advice, prompt feedback, checking in with me, and redirecting me to ensure that I complete this thesis on time. The Foundations of Education and Comparative Higher Education Classes I took with him also helped a lot in my thesis. I thank him for the explicit explanations in those classes. I also want to thank Dr. Booth for her patience, encouragement, and advice. Without her questioning my assumptions, asking tough questions especially with my methodology, the final thesis would have been far shallower and more disconnected. I would also like to thank Dr. Horner for her listening ear, even after the COVID-19 pandemic made her busier. Her enthusiasm, support, and conviction helped ease the transition to motherhood as a graduate student.

My late dad is one of the heroes in my life. I am thankful for his love, admonition, prayer, and support. I appreciate my spouse as well for his support, understanding, and love. Thank you for believing in me and providing for my needs in graduate school. To my mum and aunt, I

cannot thank you enough for nurturing me to be a disciplined and focused lady. I am grateful for the numerous parcels and gifts you keep sending me to ensure my needs are met abroad. Thank you also for giving me your shoulders to lean on in my dark moments. I cannot overlook the effort of my siblings and some closer cousins for their moral and financial support in my academic journey. With them, I feel confident and courageous in my academic sojourn.

To all my professors at Bowling Green State University and my lecturers in Nigeria, thank you for your tutelage that has prepared me for the future. I still look up to you for mentorship. I also appreciate the women in my study who took their time and resources to trust me with their stories. Without their participation, this thesis could not have existed. For those friends who have touched my life in any way since I started my master's program at BGSU, I am grateful for all you have done.

To my dearest Ateeyah, you are my God's precious gift of motherhood. May my efforts to get a better future through higher education give you a hint of the profound love I have for you. I hope my academic trajectory as a Nigerian lady will inspire you to be the best you can be in all your endeavors. Always remember that as a toddler, you and I "mastered it" in Cross-cultural and International Education at BGSU!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study	4
Significance of the Study	5
Purpose of the Study	6
Theoretical Frameworks	6
Research Questions	9
Thesis Chapter Organization.....	9
Definition of Terms.....	10
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Chapter Overview	12
Nigerian History and Society.....	12
Patriarchy and Nigerian Society	14
Nigerian Society and the Culture of Patriarchy	15
Oppression, Discrimination, and Marginalization of Women	18
Sociocultural Beliefs, Gender Norms, and Associate Challenges	18
Education	18
Dimensions of Gender Inequality in Nigeria	19
Sexual Harassment.....	19
Physical and Sexual Abuse by Spouse.....	19
Gender Inequality as Culture	20
Discrimination against Women in Religious Rituals.....	20
Female Right: Divorce & Widowhood	21

Financial Issue: Poverty and Ownership of Property	24
Poverty	24
Property Ownership and Inheritance	26
Health Issues, Maternal Mortality, and HIV/AIDS	27
Education in Nigeria	28
Pre-Colonial Education in Nigeria.....	31
History of British Colonial Education in Africa and Nigeria	32
National Policy on Education in Nigeria	36
Higher Education in Nigeria	37
Access and Equity of Higher Education to Nigerian Females.....	39
Higher Education Access and Equity Challenges for Nigerian Females.....	40
Feminism and Women Access to Higher Education in Nigeria	43
Parenting Style and Influence on Child Upbringing.....	44
Theoretical Framework.....	45
Ogbu's Cultural-Ecology Theory (Ogbu, 1981).....	45
Cultural Task and Competence.....	46
Effective Environment.....	47
Native Theory of Success	47
Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1963).....	48
Chapter Summary	49
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY	51
Chapter Overview	51
Research Questions.....	51

Introduction.....	52
Methodology: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method	53
Phenomenological Reduction	54
Epoché and Researcher’s Bias	55
Research Design.....	58
Participants and Site Location	59
Procedure	62
Data Analysis Procedure.....	64
Coding.....	64
Trustworthiness of the Study	67
Limitations of the Study.....	68
Ethical Limitations.....	68
Methodological Limitation	69
Chapter Summary	69
CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	71
Chapter Overview	71
Theme One: Home Environment and Upbringing.....	72
Parents’ Education and Parenting Style	73
Discussion	78
Gender Treatment at Home.....	80
Discussion	84
Exposure to Opportunities and Socioeconomic Status	86
Discussion	89

Synthesis	90
Theme Two: Nigerian Education and Its Impact on Female Empowerment.....	90
Motivations for Attaining Education	91
Economic Stability and Sustainability for the Future	91
Self-Actualization	92
Career Progression	93
Discussion	95
Educational Qualifications and Impact on Female Empowerment.....	98
Discussion	102
Educational Challenges.....	103
Discussion	106
Synthesis	108
Theme Three: Overcoming Educational Challenges for Career Inspiration	108
Sociocultural Challenges in Career Inspiration	109
Discussion	112
Overcoming Challenges.....	114
Discussion	115
Professional Life and Fulfillment	116
Discussion	119
Synthesis	121
Theme Four: Education-Empowering Female Identity	121
Human Agency	122

Discussion	124
Forming Identity	126
Discussion	128
Synthesis	129
Overarching Themes: Culture and Gender Stigma	130
Cultural Heterogeneity vs Homogeneity	130
Discussion	132
Forced to Submit to Cultural Expectations	133
Discussion	135
Cultural Values vs Family Values	136
Discussion	137
Synthesis	138
Chapter Summary	138
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION	140
Summary of Findings	140
Theoretical Implications & Contribution	141
Practical Implications	142
Implication for Parents	143
The Implication for Education Policymakers	144
Limitations	145
Implications for Further Research	146
REFERENCES	148

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	158
APPENDIX B. IRB TRAINING CERTIFICATE.....	160
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW FLIER.....	161
APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT.....	163
APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL.....	168

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Participants' Demographics	61
2	Themes, Codes, and Sub-themes	66

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

As a young Nigerian woman, I had most of my formative years in the metropolitan city of Lagos in Nigeria. Growing up, I was not unaware of most challenges Nigerian women experience in the patriarchal Nigerian society. I have friends and classmates who shared their experiences of sexual harassment, engagement in multiple side hustles while in school because of financial constraints, domestic violence at home, and even gender disparity. Because of my socialization into Nigerian society and the cultural competence (Ogbu, 1981) that came with them, I accepted these as normal.

Cultural competence entails the need for an individual to interactively understand the cultural norms and values of the society to be accepted. In most cases, one is socialized into the various cultural norms and values from childhood. For instance, the belief that a male child's education is a priority at the detriment of the female, allocation of domestic chores based on gender, or wielding inheritance rights to the boy child. During the literature reviews as a Graduate Assistant, I realized that gender disparity is not just in Nigeria but in other parts of the world. It then makes more sense to me as to why there are different waves of feminism. Reflectively, I realized that I am also a victim of this female suppression from childhood but because of socialization, the need to fit in and be culturally competent (Ogbu, 1981), I do not see it as a challenge but a norm in society. Therefore, I saw that I needed to belong. But with my educational exposure, I see gender disparity as disadvantage for women especially Nigerian women.

This phenomenological qualitative study, therefore, examines the lived experiences of 19 Nigerian women who have been able to overcome some sociocultural challenges and build their identities through higher education. Nigerian women experience different shades of ill-treatment because of what Ogbu (1981) calls cultural tasks in human competence thereby preventing them from developing their identity. The participants in this study are all Nigerian females who were born and raised in Nigeria. They are all educated as well except for one participant who is yet to complete her bachelor's degree. For these Nigerian women, higher education has helped them to break away from the barriers of cultural beliefs that subsume them under the hegemonic male dominance. Most of these women have also been able to build their identities and self-esteem because of their exposure to higher education. This study, therefore, explores the various sociocultural challenges Nigerian women face in their identity development and how higher education has helped them to overcome these challenges.

Since the topic deals with identity development and cultural ecology, Ogbu's cultural-ecology perspective and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Ogbu and Erikson's studies reveal that each child grows in a complex interconnected ecosystem with culture constantly evolving in thoughts and actions (Greene, 1994). The importance of the environment also explains the ill-treatment meted on the female child because most participants referred to their environment as the key factor that shapes them. Based on the reviewed literature and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development of resolving the crisis at each developmental stages of child development, it is therefore suggested that all forms of gender disparity should be avoided in the home to help in the development of hope and drive good self-esteem in the girl child. Training the child to believe in herself from home would help in the ego identity and integrity of the child as an older adult (Erikson, 1963).

One of the limitations of this study is access to successful Nigerian females without a college education. This limitation is attributed to the *new normal* because all the interviews were conducted online via the video meeting platform, *Zoom*. The researcher was not able to travel to Nigeria to interview women without internet access, given the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, further studies can be based on comparing the ego-identity of college-educated Nigerian women and those without a university degree. There can also be a further study of comparing gender issues in Nigeria and the West.

Gender norms across Nigeria also exhibit some differences between ethnic groups. Within Nigeria, the Igbos are mainly in the Southeastern part of Nigeria with various dialects of the Igbo language. Hausas on the other hand are mostly in the Northern part of Nigeria, they are mostly Muslims, and they speak various dialects of the Hausa language. Gender norms among the Igbos are somewhat different from gender norms among the Hausas. Among the Igbo, sons are preferred and there is no right of inheritance for daughters. Among the Hausas who are mostly Muslims, the Islamic doctrine is practiced at the peak, and women are restricted to the homestead because of their religious beliefs.

Among the core beliefs animating this study is that parents should raise their children without regard to gender. Parents should ensure that they treat their children equally regardless of gender. On the part of government and policymakers, women should be fully involved in the decision-making process and measures should be put in place to give a voice to rape victims without discrimination. Education should also be well funded; scholarships and financial aids should be made available to indigent female students to avoid dropouts as well.

Background of the Study

Many countries of the world, through international conventions and commitments, have recognized education as an instrument for promoting fundamental human rights (Evans-Obinna, 2016). Nigeria recognizes education as the major instrument for national development, including social, economic, and political development (Asiyai, 2013). Fafunwa (1994) as cited in Boyi (2013) sees education as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behaviors which are of positive value to the society in which he lives” (p. 148). This implies that education has to do with the totality of what an individual is exposed to formally, informally, and semi-formally to bring about a desirable change in an individual’s behavior, thereby enabling the individual to contribute meaningfully and positively to societal development.

Yet, education as a process seems one-sided with credence to gender inequality which is mainly traceable to the male-dominated nature of the Nigerian society. Historically, education for the female, in general, was seen as a waste in Africa and this is especially true for Nigeria. British colonial administrators and missionaries introduced formal education with different provisions for boys and girls (Booth, 2002). In colonial times, girls were seen as one who would end up in the kitchen and their education was tailored towards domesticity, such as maintaining a home (Booth, 2002). Consequently, little or no attention was paid to her education generally (Akinsowon & Osisanwo, 2014). However, education is often seen as a panacea to curb the challenges facing Nigerian females, and a place where they can build their identity. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the various challenges that beset Nigerian women and how some have been able to use higher education to overcome these challenges, build their identity and self-esteem. Hence, the role of higher education in relation to these challenges and to

understanding how Nigerian women's identities are developed through their experiences and education is considered. It should be noted that education in this context is not limited to the school/ four walls of the classroom as pointed out by Fafunwa (1994). Though the focus is higher education but with cultural competence, other levels of education are considered in parsing.

Significance of the Study

The study explores the challenges that sociocultural barriers place on Nigerian females, how some have been able to navigate through these challenges, carve a niche for themselves and become successful individuals in society through their success in higher education. Therefore, this study further corroborates the importance of higher education in building identity. Education is a process of developing positive values and attitudes that enable people especially women in a patriarchal society to add values to society (Fafunwa, 1994). This means that the impact of education includes the totality of what the child or an individual is exposed to formally, informally, and semi-formally to bring about a desirable change in such individual's behavior and, for such individual to be able to contribute meaningfully and positively to the societal development. Hence, I look at the effect of education as a positive and life-changing one in this study. It also reflects a workable strategy for identity building through higher education for Nigerian females.

Therefore, this study is important because it shows how socio-cultural barriers prevent women from achieving their goals and how they navigate through the problems with the acquisition of higher education. It is also important because it will contribute to the body of knowledge of how education helps in identity development not only in Nigeria but by people who menstruate generally, in Africa, and possibly in the globe.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to hear from the female participants about environmental, cultural, and schooling challenges they have faced in Nigeria and what experiences helped them to overcome these challenges. In Nigeria, education is widely seen as a tool for self-development and self-reliance (NPE, 2004). Hence, I will explore how higher education has been used by Nigerian females to build their identity with the notion of using those strategies employed to encourage younger generations of Nigerians and African women. I also hope that this study will contribute meaningfully to the academic field of women in higher education not only in Africa but around the globe.

Theoretical Frameworks

Since society ascribes roles and identity based on gender and sexual orientations, Ogbu's cultural-ecology theory is one of the theoretical frameworks for this study. According to Ogbu (1981) in his cultural-ecology theory of child development, family child-rearing in a similar micro setting and subsequent adolescent socialization affects the development of instrumental competencies needed for adult economic, political, and social roles. Although these cultural imperatives and competencies vary according to culture, the cross-cultural comparison is appropriate in the context of competence. Due to this, the various limits that Nigerian culture places on Nigerian females in their socialization are visible using Ogbu's cultural-ecology model. In explaining human behavior, both personal and environmental factors are crucial (Lewin, 2013). Hence, as Greene notes, "the child is bathed in a culture like fishes are bathed by the sea, but culture, as a concept, is even more shifting and elusive than water" (1994, p. 354). This cultural imperative has subsumed females to patriarchy in Nigeria.

The second theoretical framework for this study is Erikson's (1963) psychosocial development. I am including this theory because it reflects the child as a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate), influenced by the parents and society from early childhood. Erikson emphasizes the processes of developing a healthy personality. He focuses on crises and how resolving crises at each developmental stage affects the child's future development and identity (Erikson, 1963). Although this theory draws on Freudian theory, Erikson's theory is applicable cross-culturally, because he acknowledged the importance of contextual social interactions with attention to the entire life span, with the cultural environment and parental upbringing as crucial factors (Bang, 2014).

Adolescence is a crucial time when the child tries to integrate many roles to develop a self-image by imitating a role model or by peer pressure. (Erikson, 1963; Bang, 2014). The integration of many roles to develop a self-image and identity is explained using Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963). Erikson's theory sets up a framework to consider the growth orientation of an individual from childhood to adulthood. He examined crisis and how to resolve them at eight different but interrelated developmental stages to enable an individual's development.

Erikson (1963) identified eight time periods called stages with each having two possible outcomes. The first stage is trust and distrust, in which hope is the power gained by the baby. Infants learn to trust people who provide them with care and warmth and teach them that people in the world can be relied upon. The second stage is autonomy versus shame when children are taught to center their limbic functions to become confident in their abilities and feel secure in their choices. The third stage is the oedipal stage and permits children to be decisive and practice leadership through their childhood games. The focus of the fourth stage is the incubation period,

during which their abilities have been enhanced, making them proud of their achievements. After the incubation stage is the adolescence stage, at this stage, the basic strength of loyalty and self-identity are the result of successful problem-solving. Intimacy versus isolation is the sixth stage and it centers on friendships and affiliations that lead to self-identity. The seventh stage is the mid-adulthood where the people help in self-building for the future and finally is the age where ego-identity is achieved when earlier crises are successfully resolved. Because the participants in my study are adults, the crisis they must resolve at this stage is between identity and role confusion thereby leading to either fidelity or devotion. When intimacy conflicts with isolation, resolving the youth crisis will prepare the individual for young adulthood. At this stage, the ability to commit to significant others is key to foster love and affiliation (Erikson, 1963).

In Nigeria, due to the collective and communal nature of child-rearing, the adult's social world includes the extended family as significant others. This can make it challenging for a woman to enjoy her matrimonial home because of the prying eyes and demands of these *significant others* like in-laws, neighbors, and friends. In this situation, the young woman may develop either stagnation or generativity in middle-age adulthood, when one seeks satisfaction and productivity in career and family. Successful resolution of this early adult crisis can lead to careful dependability on others which makes them productive and prepares the individual for older adulthood. If the child lacks trust as an infant, this can influence the child's ego and integrity as an older adult because each of Erikson's eight-crisis periods builds on the other in a chronological but interrelated manner.

In sum, Ogbu's theory illuminates the crucial role of environmental factors and socialization in the child's upbringing. Erikson's theory on the other hand appreciates the importance of the different developmental changes of the child in identity-building into

adulthood. These two theories culminate into the importance of how family upbringing and environmental factors lead to females' suppression in the male-centered Nigerian society.

Research Questions

The study focuses on three research questions:

- a. What challenges do female Nigerian face in the Nigerian education system?
- b. What stories do female Nigerians share about steps they have taken to empower themselves?
- c. What do female Nigerians see as the role of education in their identity development?

Thesis Chapter Organization

This five-chapter thesis is organized in a way to enhance the reader's understanding of the background of the problem that led to the research questions, the choice of the theoretical frameworks, and relatedness to the literature review. Next follows the research methods for this study, then, a detailed description of the findings of the study. The limitations are outlined and suggestions for further study are proposed.

Chapter One introduces the thesis purpose, justification of the study, the research question, and the definition of key terms. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on patriarchy in Nigeria challenges that Nigerian females face, accessibility of higher education for Nigerian females, and how their identity is built through higher education. Chapter Three describes the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and explains the procedures for participant selection, data collection, and analysis. Chapter Four describes the findings, detailing the lived experiences of the 19 Nigerian women participants. The findings are organized thematically. Each theme includes several sub-themes, which rely on lengthy direct quotations from the interviews to give voice to the participants and to substantiate the sub-themes. Explanations of the sub-themes are

followed by discussions interpreted through the theoretical framework and informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Each theme is concluded with a synthesis of the sub-themes. Chapter Five describes the implications of this study and suggestions for future research.

Definition of Terms

Patriarchy: In this study, patriarchy is defined as a system of male dominance. The patriarchal system sees females as inferior to men by giving men respect and power as the household head. (Stacey, 1993; Makama, 2013). It is a structural system of emphasizing social relations as it enables men to dominate women in different layers of human endeavors (Asiyanbola, 2005).

Gender and Sex: Gender is a societal ascribed meaning of being male or female (Alamveabee, 2005). It entails the sociocultural ways of assigning roles to males and females. Sex on the other hand refers to the biological characterization of being male or female as a natural ordering (Wilson, 1975).

Cultural competence: In this study, I used Ogbu's definition of cultural competence. To him, cultural competence is the ability to perform a culturally specified socially valued role and task in a society with the power to influence such a society (Ogbu, 1981).

Phenomenology: This is a qualitative method of research based on Husserl's writing. This methodology is concerned with the lived experiences of people as they experience a particular phenomenon and the meaning they give to these experiences in their daily lives (Creswell, 2007; Christensen & Johnson, 2016)

Higher education: In consonance with Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), higher education in this study is regarded as all forms of post-secondary education. This

includes the education acquired in Colleges of Education, polytechnics, and universities in Nigeria.

Identity: In this study, identity refers to who the participants see themselves to be in terms of their human agency and perception of self (Levesque, 2011). For example, the identity of all the participants as Nigerians and as females. The description of their attributes also characterizes identity in this study.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

This chapter is an in-depth review of literature relevant to the research questions on how higher education can build the identity of Nigerian female citizens. Specifically, the research questions this literature review covers are: (1) What challenges do the female Nigerians face in the Nigerian society and the education system? (2) What stories do the Nigerian women share about any special steps they have taken to empower themselves? And (3) what do the Nigerian women see as the role of education in their identity development? In addressing these questions, this chapter is divided into different but interwoven sections to foreground the points that will enhance the knowledge gap regarding Nigerian women's identity building through higher education.

The first part of this chapter summarizes the patriarchal structure of Nigerian society with a focus on the sociocultural beliefs that affect female Nigerians. The second part examines the Nigerian education system historically, from the pre-colonial era to present-day Nigeria as it pertains to accessibility for the girl child. Part three highlights the ways formal schooling influences identity development and self-esteem among Nigerian female citizens. The final part of this chapter presents Ogbu's Cultural-Ecology theory and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. These theories are used to analyze the various aspects of Nigerian women's identity development in the face of sociocultural challenges.

Nigerian History and Society

Nigeria is known officially as the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). Nigeria is a country of rich ethnocultural diversity with over 250 ethnic groups and Indigenous languages with an estimated population of 219.5 million (United States Census Bureau, 2020). Before the

amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate by Frederick Lugard, the former British Governor-General of Nigeria, on 1st of January 1914, pre-colonial Nigeria consisted of different ethnic called tribes with distinct languages and cultures (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These ethnic lines were generally drawn between the North and South (Burns, 1929). The Southern part was and is still mostly dominated by the Yorubas and the Igbos while the Northern part was and is still dominated by the Hausas (Falola & Heaton, 2008). By 1914, the British government took over Nigeria as a colonial territory. They put in place administrative and legal structures of indirect rule through the established traditional rulers (Burns, 1929). According to Burns (1929), Northern and Southern Nigeria had separate and different traditions, histories, and administrations regarded as protectorates. Because of these differences, the British used an indirect rule system to penetrate the different protectorates' religions and cultures (Burns, 1929). Today, Muslims live mostly in the North, Christians are mostly in the South, and some also practice indigenous religions (Tonade, 2009). Nigeria gained independence on October 1st, 1960 and was declared a Republic on October 1st, 1963.

Geographically, Nigeria is a West African country bordered in the north by the Niger Republic, Cameroon in the east, the Benin Republic in the west, and the Gulf of Guinea in the south (Ojo, Vickers & Ballas, 2012). There are thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. Nigeria is a member of the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), Commonwealth, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). According to Gordon (2003), Nigeria has a total landmass area of 356,669 square miles rich in natural resources. Oil is the main source of income and Nigeria is among the top ten oil exporters in the world with 2.15 million barrels per day (EIA, 2006).

In terms of administration, the administrative zones in Nigeria are based on the geographical location of each state and their ethnicity (Ojo, Vickers & Ballas, 2012). According to Ojo et al. (2012), the South West, South East, and North West/North East are dominated by the three major ethnic groups, the North Central and South-South zones are composed of less populated ethnic groups.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous in the world. As a heterogeneous country, there are over 250 ethnic groups with about 500 languages with diverse cultures (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Among these ethnic groups, the largest and main ethnic groups are the Northern Hausa-Fulani, the Western Yoruba, and the Eastern Igbo (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Because of British colonization, the official language of Nigeria is English, but local languages are the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary education (NPE, 2004). The dominant languages are Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo.

Patriarchy and Nigerian Society. Patriarchy encompasses the social relations that subsume females under the male hegemony, and it is a common and expected experience in Nigeria (Makama, 2013). The various challenges that females experience under patriarchy in Nigeria from childhood are herein discussed. In doing this, domestic factors, gender relations, and child upbringing in home and school are also addressed. This leads to the examination of the various challenges that women face from childhood ranging from male child preference to a gender role assignment, education, career choice, and even freedom of association.

Etymologically, the word “patriarchy” is from the Greek *patriarkhēs*, meaning “father” or “chief of a race” (etymonline.com, n.d.). In analyzing gender relations, therefore, the notion of patriarchy is important (Walby, 1989). Under patriarchal systems, fathers are seen as the household head, providing essential needs to the family, has the final authority on home affairs,

and men maintain this authority by silencing women (Kramarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Makama, 2013). Kramarae (1992), Stacey (1993), and Makama (2013) characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system oppressive to women. According to Stacey (1993), patriarchy is a politico-social system of freedom and subjection with the latter representing women and the former representing men. Aina (1998) and Okpe (2005) argue it as the organization of political, economic, sociocultural, religious, industrial, and financial hierarchies placing men in the upper position and women on the lower rungs of the ladder. Cockburn (2004) sees patriarchy as a systemic way of vesting men with leadership, authority, aggressiveness, and responsibility while bestowing women with nurturing compliant, passive, and generally dependent roles. Thus, patriarchy favors men over women. To Asiyanbola (2005), patriarchy is a structural system that emphasizes social relations and enables men to dominate women in different endeavors. Therefore, any system that favors men over women is regarded as patriarchy and this is in practice in Nigeria.

Nigerian Society and the Culture of Patriarchy. Patriarchy was prevalent in precolonial and colonial Nigerian society in various forms. As an ethnically and linguistically diverse country, there are varied but similar forms of patriarchy in the country. Patriarchy manifests itself in Nigerian society by placing socio-cultural constraints on the girl child while the boy enjoys freedom (Aina, 1998). Girls are also made to see themselves as the weaker ones (Okpe, 2005; Nnadi, 2013) and this identity lingers into adulthood unless they can resolve the identity crisis and develop their self-esteem (Erikson, 1963). In historic and present-day Nigerian society, femaleness is characterized by weakness, gentleness, and the kitchen is her permanent place regardless of the education level she attained (Asiyanbola, 2005; Makama, 2013; Dogo,

2014). According to Ferriera (2004), patriarchy discriminates against females socially, economically, politically, and culturally.

In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, individuals adhere to clearly defined gender roles to conform to the cultural task (Makama, 2013; Ogbu, 1981). Individuals are socialized into the understanding of gender roles from birth; this affects their beliefs and identity makeup as they try to resolve the various crises at each developmental stage (Erikson, 1963). In Nigeria, a woman's space is the home, where her sole responsibilities include domestic chores, childbearing, and satisfying the sexual urges of the husband (Azodo & Eke 2007; Dogo, 2014). Unlike Nigerian women, men are encouraged to leave the homesteads for work and war. They are charged with providing all the family needs while women care and nurture the family (Makama, 2013).

The discrimination that girls experience in Nigeria leads most of them into roles as house helps, traders who hawk on the street or to be forced into prostitution, and human trafficking (Makama, 2013). These girls grow up as Nigerian women who are second-class citizens and their rights are not well represented in public affairs (Makama, 2013). For example, working-class women are paid less than men even though they have similar production output. Gender inequality and discrimination are rampant in Nigerian society and this is traceable to the sociocultural beliefs of the Nigerians.

From birth, children are socialized into ascribed gender roles (Asiyanbola, 2005; Makama 2013). These roles clearly define domestic chores for the boy and the girl child. These responsibilities are assigned according to their birth order which Nigerians, especially the Southerners (Igbo and Yoruba) are keen to respect (Asiyanbola, 2005). According to Asiyanbola (2005), these roles also emphasize the behavior that is expected of a boy and a girl both within the family and the larger society.

Nigerian society connects gender with sex from early childhood, especially among the Igbos, where there is a preference for sons (Nnadi, 2013) because the male child will carry the family lineage while a female child will be married off to another family (Omadjohwoefe, 2011; Akintan, 2013). Therefore, boys and girls are treated differently from birth in terms of their given names (Nandi, 2013), household chores, privileges, restrictions, and freedom in adolescence (Omadjohwoefe, 2011; Nnadi, 2013; Makama, 2013). Female children are restricted to the home, house chores, and take care of younger siblings while the male is free to mingle with peers, sent on errands outside the home, and follows his father to the farm or in his father's profession (Akintan, 2013). This implies that there is close monitoring of female movement while the male child is given freedom. Growing from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, Nigerian children are exposed to social roles determined by their gender (Akintan, 2013; Nnadi, 2013; Makama, 2013). Therefore, gender inappropriate behaviors and roles are strongly discouraged because of the societal emphasis on gender differentiation (Omadjohwoefe, 2011; Dogo, 2014).

According to Judith Lorber (1994), gendered norms and expectations are enforced. This is because adults and constituted authorities sanction inappropriate gender roles. Peers and relatives also discriminate against unacceptable gender behaviors (Dogo, 2014). With the sanction and punishment for inappropriate gender behaviors, parents usually enforce the appropriate gendered behaviors in the child from home to make the child fit into the culture and tradition of the society, just as peers and society ensure that these roles are maintained (Dogo, 2014). Regarding Nigerian men, Chinwe Abara (2012) mentions that "in the culture and traditional environment...as a male child grows, he finds out that his sex confers something extra on him" (p. 9). The same tradition deprived females of their basic rights (Dogo, 2014).

Oppression, Discrimination, and Marginalization of Women. In Nigeria, power and authority are vested in men because male-centeredness permeates society. This means that power resides with men in the family system, clan, or tribe (Asiyanbola, 2005; Makama, 2013). Thus, power and possession are transmitted from father to son in a generational manner (Makama, 2013). Walby (1990) sees this as a *double D*, the discrimination and domination of women. According to Salaam (2003) and Makama (2013), patriarchy encompasses the marginalization of women in education, wealth or property ownership, industries and business involvement, domestic matters, and inheritance rights. For example, in Nigeria, and especially among the Igbo, a male child has the right to inherit the father's property, but a female child does not because she is expected to marry and join another household (Nnadi, 2013).

Sociocultural Beliefs, Gender Norms, and Associated Challenges. Formal education of the female child into a virtuous woman is an important value in Nigeria. She is to be prepared to become a contributing member of society in all ramifications. There are various sociocultural challenges that Nigerian females face and how higher education has helped them to overcome these challenges is an important thing to consider. The challenges facing adult Nigerian women include unequal power relationships, harassment, violence, lack of education, low income at work, passive political involvement, and inability to inherit or own valuable properties like land and cars.

Education. Lack of access to education is one of the challenges caused by gender issues, socio-cultural beliefs, and practices (Ogbuagu, 2009). Often, female children are usually denied education when the family has limited financial means. As such, the male child is sent to formal school while the female is sent to learn vocations like tailoring, trading, hairdressing (Robson, 2004). As an apprentice, these young girls are abused sexually, physically, and even emotionally.

Fawole, Ajuwon, and Osungbade (2004) discovered after their intervention program that, after five months, there were still 22.7% of sexual harassment cases among the female apprentices as compared to about 70% before the intervention in Ibadan, Nigeria. This means that education can help boost female identity development in Nigeria. It only requires that everyone is involved to achieve this aim.

Dimensions of Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Sexual Harassment. Sexual harassment is another challenge facing girls and women in Nigeria. Harassment is not only in school but also at home, places of work, and in religious places. An example⁶ is the recent “sex for grade” and “sex for admission” hashtag video published by the BBC World Service (2019) by Africa Eye Undercover, which reveals a professor in a prestigious university in Nigeria who harassed females for grades, especially the high school students that are seeking admission into the university. The professor mentioned that the staff club where they ought to have academic deliberations is regarded as the *cold room* for sexual harassment activities. With this, there were other revelations about all the acts of harassment on female students in Nigerian universities on social media, especially Facebook and Twitter. In another instance, a common practice is for employers to make it a condition for female job seekers to lay in bed with them before offering them a job. For promotion and other incentives, females are harassed sexually by their male bosses at work and home from time to time (Aborisade, 2020).

Physical and Sexual Abuse by Spouse. Physically, women can be seen as punching bags by their husbands when there is a misunderstanding. Unfortunately, society prevents the woman from raising her hand to retaliate. However, instead of blaming the husband for his act of beating the wife, the wife is unfortunately blamed for getting on the man’s nerves. In sum, the

physical and sexual harassment of females is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the body of everyone in the patriarchal Nigerian society (Oluremi, 2015).

Gender Inequality as Culture. Culture is the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and understanding that are learned by socialization (Zimmerman, 2017). Nonyelu (2009) defines culture as the totality of a given people's way of life, and Robinson (1999) sees culture as the customs, ideas, values of civilization, society, or social group especially at a time. It then follows that culture is a learned and man-made behavior that sets one group of people apart from others. It is transmitted from generation to generation and practiced over time. From these definitions, culture is the totality of the way of life of a group of people in a community. It is acquired, learned consciously and unconsciously from one generation to the other. It includes food, religion, clothing, language, marriage, belief system, and manners.

The Nigerian culture subsumes the female under their male counterpart. Apart from the female oppression, multiple cultural-related issues affect the female folks in the different regions of Nigeria. The cultural and inequality issues will be delved into in terms of religious beliefs, especially discrimination during religious rituals and treatment of women, marriage and divorce issues, widowhood, and the right to own properties.

Discrimination against Women in Religious Rituals. The diversity of the country is not limited to the language but also the religious beliefs of the people. Muslims are the majority from the North. Their population in the North and minority in the South account for more than 50% of the entire population. 40% are Christians, mainly in the South with a significant amount in the North, and 10% are traditional African believers (Abubakar, 2017).

To date, there are some religious rites, especially in some southwestern and almost northern parts of Nigeria, that forbid women from taking part in some religious activities. They have secluded them from the traditional rites because of their gender construct as females. An example is the *Oro* festival, which is very rampant in the Ikorodu area of Lagos state. During this festival, females are prevented from seeing the masquerade. Aside from denying them the right to participate in the festival, there is also usually a curfew whereby women and girls are denied their daily occupational activities for those days. If they must go to school or work, they must look for temporary accommodation for the period that the *Oro* cultural festival is going on. Culturally, it is believed that when the females see the *oro*, they will die, or evil will befall them. Another religious belief in the southwest, practiced especially by the Yoruba people, is that a woman cannot be a crowned king. If she is privileged to be an *Adele*, a regent, she must start exhibiting the attribute of a man in all ramifications except biologically.

Also, in the Northern part of Nigeria, the Islamic religious belief has been interpreted to silence the females. Total seclusion is the fate of the girls in the north, ranging from prevention from attending formal school to taking up jobs (Abiola, Obokoh, & Jaiyeola, 2020). Their main choice of occupation is house domestication and production/rearing of children. It is believed that women are the properties of their husbands and have no say in the decision-making at home. Hence, women, who account for almost half of the entire population in Nigeria, are generally behind in all aspects of life economically, socially, politically, and intellectually (Abubakar, 2017).

Female Right: Divorce & Widowhood. Another significant cultural practice in Nigeria is the issue of divorce in marriage. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has over two hundred ethnic groups that were merged through colonialism by Frederick Lord Lugard in 1914, but these multi-

ethnic variations have a historical bond in three forms of marriage, which fall under Statutory, Customary, and Islamic Laws that are all recognized by Nigerian Law (Lazarus, Rush, Dibiana & Monks, 2017). Because of the historical, religious, and cultural beliefs of each tribe, statutory and customary marriages are common in the entire country, while Islamic marriages are common in the north due to the dominance of the Islamic religion in that part of the country (Lazarus, Rush, Dibiana & Moks, 2017). For every divorce in Nigeria, especially in the southeastern and southwestern part of Nigeria, the woman is blamed. Statutory marriage and divorce procedures are derived from English common law and regulated by the Nigerian Marriage Act (MCA of 1990). While it is easy for a divorced male to remarry, it is almost impossible for the female counterpart to remarry due to the cultural belief of stigmatizing a divorced woman (Lazarus, Rush, Dibiana and Monks, 2017). She is not only regarded as having been irresponsible, but she is seen as impatient and arrogant. This is especially if the woman is educated and a professional with a good income when compared to the divorced spouse. This means that the woman is responsible for making the marriage a successful one. To avoid rebuke, dishonor, and *disgrace of divorce*, Nigerian women are made to sacrifice a lot to keep the sanctity of marriage (Abubakar, 2017).

Another cultural practice against women in the southwestern part of Nigeria is the harsh treatment of widows. Because of Nigeria's patriarchal system, “women are regarded as less[er] human beings, especially among the Igbos in South Eastern Nigeria” (Nwogu, 2015 p. 79). Despite the various ill-treatment of females and women, widows who should receive other peoples’ empathy, because of their bereaved loved ones are the fulcrum of these debased treatments (Nwogu, 2015). Instead, these widows are subjected to various agonizing, painful, and dehumanizing treatments during their mourning rites. These treatments affect them socially,

psychologically, and physically. These cultural practices are accepted and executed by fellow women called the *Umuadas* (Nwogu, 2015). Indeed, women are the enemies of fellow women. One point to note is that widowhood is concerned with the observance of certain rites by women, and these rites are different from one culture to the other in Nigeria. Even among the Southeasterners (Igbos) which is the focus here, there seem to be slight but obvious differences from one Igbo community/state to the other on widowhood rites. One common practice is that the death of the husband brings about varying archaic, barbaric, and anachronistic practices on the widow. These practices are attributed to the cultural belief and practices of the land. An example of widowhood rite is pointed out by Afolaya (2011) as mourning rituals and food taboos that are enforced on widows. These mourning rituals expose them to economic hardship, confinement, and ill-treatment. In this instance according to Afolaya (2011), women are regarded as objects of rights rather than subjects of rights. They are subservient to the husband while alive and still made so at the demise of the husband. They are made to suffer double jeopardy by exposing them to the excruciating cultural rites of proving their innocence in the death of their husbands (Arinze-Umobi, 2008).

Widowhood rites are widely practiced Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi states in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The woman is expected to wail and cry loudly at her husband's death day and night, but the male counterparts are not expected to show this outward grief when they lose their wives in the cold hand of death. This treatment is given to the females because of the reason pointed out by Oloko (1997) that rarely does an Igbo man die for nothing, and usually, the wife is the first suspect. Where she is accused of being involved in the husband's death, she must prove her innocence by drinking the water by which the corpse was washed, eating kola nut offered by the elders or the high priest, and being locked up with her husband's corpse for days

before the burial of the deceased husband. Apart from drinking the corpse water and staying in the same room with the corpse for days, the hair on her body (head, pubic region, and armpit) is compulsorily shaved, and to further complicate issues, some cultures demand that she sleeps with the community's high priest to separate her spirit from that of her deceased husband as a mark of purification (Arinze-Umobi and Anyogu, 2011). She is also made to sit in a chair or mat throughout, and in some cultures, she is not allowed to sleep in the afternoon or even to shake anybody. Her attire throughout the mourning period is black, although some cultures prefer white to black. The reason for all these treatments is to show respect for the dead, to facilitate the husband's spirit movement to the spirit world, and to protect the living from the dead (Anyogu, 2008).

Just as the treatment of widowhood is agonizing in the southeastern part, it is comparatively milder in the southwest. The major activity is *sulopo*, where wife is made to marry the father of the deceased or the younger brother or elder brother of the deceased. When she refuses to remarry any of them, she will be ostracized, and if the woman is not strong enough, she may end up leaving the household. However, the widowhood issue is not common in the north as there are no relevant works of literature cited so far in this regard. This may be due to the strong belief in the Islamic religion and its dictates. Nevertheless, a question that rightly comes to a critical mind is, why is the male widower not forced to do this as well on the premise of the same reasons highlighted for the female?

Financial Issue: Poverty and Ownership of Property

Poverty. McFadden (1997) mentions poverty as a mechanism to silence women. This has affected women not only in Nigeria but in Africa as a whole. This explains that poverty has women's faces with the notion that women are not paid on an equal basis with their male

counterparts. They are also restricted from doing some types of work. For example, in the Northern part of Nigeria, secluded females are not allowed to engage in any money-making activities. As a result of this, women, therefore, cannot participate in administrative activities in the home and the country (Agbaje, 2019). Even when they are doing great jobs and fostering development at the local level, there is no funding made available for them to attract and publicize for more women's empowerment. Agbaje (2019) explains that Nigerian women suffer from political illiteracy, which is tantamount to their seclusion from the political arena and sphere of decision-making. Agbaje's current dimensional studies led to discovering that modern Nigerian women are on the lowest rung of poverty condition. Intellectually, a higher proportion of Nigerian men go to school than women. Thus, neither their participation in forming nor administering the government is yet matured. Perhaps religion and tradition are used to oppress Nigerian women (Abubakar, 2017).

As a result of poverty, girls are forced into prostitution to avoid poverty, even in marriage. It is believed that even when married, women should not deny their husband's amorous advances (Mensah, 2019). Domestically, women are objectified for sex and must always be ready to satisfy the husband's libidinous desires, and the woman dares not to complain when her sexual urge is not satisfied by the husband. If she does, she is tagged a whore, but she must never complain when her husband's sexual urge is not satisfied. She must be readily available to always meet his sexual needs.

Equally of note is how transactional sex has become a pervasive sexual culture because of society's stereotyped gender expectations where the man provides, the woman is subordinated and compensated (Mensah, 2019). From the qualitative ethnographic account by Mensah (2019), transactional sex is synonymous with the commodification/commercialization of women. It is

common among two sets of people: the economically less privileged class and the privileged class. Mensah (2019) noted that the fulfillment of heterosexual behavior by the two groups is for economic empowerment. While the economically less privileged motive is propelled by relative poverty, peer influence, and zeal to conform to stereotyped gender societal expectations in heterosexual relationships, the privileged class is motivated by the prospect of marriage, and therefore characterized by resistant identity and alternative interpretation of subjective meaning in reemphasizing their feminine traits (Mensah, 2019).

Property Ownership and Inheritance. Traditionally, women are excluded from ownership of landed property, which is culturally the exclusive realm of men. This is especially common among the Yorubas and the Igbos (Nwogu, 2015). Land or car ownership by females, especially unmarried females, is not sanctioned culturally. Little wonder that Madam Funmilayo Ransome Kuti is popular in history as the first woman to drive a car in Nigeria. In recent times, a young lady/woman driving a car is said to be avoided by prospective suitors because of the belief that she may not be submissive to her husband since she owns a car or other valuable properties (Aluko, 2019). Meanwhile, a young man driving a car is every woman's dream (Basden, 1927) in Daggers (2011). According to Basden, this position of limitation, especially among the Igbo women is under the customary law of inheritance, where women have but few rights in any circumstances and can hold such property as their Lords' permit. The only possessions that can be labeled as the property of a wife are her basket, calabash, cocoa farm, cooking utensils, and water pot.

In the same way, the girl or woman is also not expected to inherit from her father's estate under the Igbo customary law of South Eastern Nigeria (Nwogu, 2015). This is in contradiction with the Yoruba customary law and tradition of South Western Nigeria, which

recognizes the rights of daughters to inherit their father's property or estate (Nwogu, 2015). However, a Yoruba wife is excluded from inheriting her husband's estate under native law and custom because the "devolution of property follows the blood" (Nwogu, 2015, p. 85). It then means that under Yoruba custom, the property is shared with the children regardless of gender, but never on the wife because she shares in her own father's estate with her brothers. This seems fair on the Yoruba girl because, if she cannot own valuable property through her husband, she is entitled to ownership through her father, unlike the Igbo girl/woman who can neither own valuable property through her husband nor her father (Aluko, 2019).

Health Issues, Maternal Mortality, and HIV/AIDS

Maternal mortalities remain a serious problem in low- and middle-income countries, which account for 99% of the global number of maternal deaths. Sub-Saharan Africa alone accounts for 56% of the global burden (Ugwu & Kok, 2015). Many women's death in developing countries especially sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria as an example, is attributed to pregnancy-related causes. Minimizing this has been the challenge of international initiatives including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Provision of emergency obstetrics care like the cesarean section was thought to reduce this maternal mortality but from research by Ugwu and Kok (2015), socio-cultural issues in Sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria deter women from accepting Caesarian-Section (CS). Some of these factors are but not limited to gender and religious ideologies as it concerns the consequence of having a CS, the role of alternative health providers (traditional birth attendants and faith healers), and delays in receiving obstetrics care. In terms of gender and religious ideologies regarding the consequences of caesarian-section, it is believed that one should not embark on CS as God can take care of everything that pertains to a man (Ugwu & Kok, 2015). Hence, religious doctrines forbid people

from accepting CS even when they are in pain. The reason for this non-acceptance of CS is their ignorance of the necessity and critical importance of CS on the mother and the fetus. Culturally, some men are against CS being carried out on their wives.

In addition to the health issues facing women and girls is the growing discourse on the impact of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Nigeria as a developing country is not an exception to the countries affected. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most heavily affected region in the global HIV epidemic, where 23.5million people are living with HIV/AIDS. This figure represents 69% of the global HIV burden, while women account for 58% of the cases (UNAIDS, 2012 in Adegoke & Steyn, 2017). This shows that women and girls are the most affected gender mostly because of heterosexual modes of contact. Although it is generally known that it is not only through heterosexual intercourse that HIV/AIDS can be contacted, it can also be contracted through sharing sharp objects with an infected person, or other methods too. In Nigeria, the female or mother is heavily blamed solely for promiscuity if she has HIV/AIDS without thinking of other ways she might have been infested (Tonade, 2014). Even if her sexual partner has the virus, the woman is blamed for infecting him.

Education in Nigeria

While the terms “education” and “schooling” are used interchangeably, they seem to refer to the different but related processes of leading an individual out of ignorance (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2013). Historically, education is “the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that efforts...” (Cremin, 1977, pp.135-136, quoted in Sadovnik, Cookson and Semel 2013, p. 21). This definition of education is holistic, as it encompasses all the processes of

education and the various agents of socialization that helps in the education and development of the individual.

Theoretically, education has often been retheorized under Human Capital Theory as primarily an economic device (Fitzsimons, 2017). According to Fitzsimmons, Human Capital Theory is the most influential economic theory of western education because it sets the framework of government policies since the early 1960s. This theory is a major determinant of the economic performance of an individual as human capital. It has various usage like technological change, research, innovation, productivity, education, and competitiveness (Fitzsimons, 2017).

Considering the purpose of education in the traditional and modern Nigerian society, it is important to trace this back to the general philosophy of education in Nigeria. In Nigeria, education is explicitly an instrument for national development; it fosters the development of the individual, for everyone's sake, and the general development of the society. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around is key without leaving out the acquisition of appropriate skills and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Adaralegbe, 1972). The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) section one, subsection three highlights the national goals of Nigeria which all levels of the Nigeria education system are built.

The system of education in Nigeria is structured into Early Childhood/Primary education, Secondary education, and Tertiary education (NPE, 2014). All these levels could be public, private, or religious. The education system in Nigeria is based on the 1-6-3-3-4 formula (one-year pre-primary education, six years primary, three years junior secondary, three years senior secondary, and a minimum of four years tertiary if one is going to university and not college or

polytechnic (Adekunle, 2019). This system is said to have been successfully adopted in other countries like Germany, China, and Ghana before it was adopted in Nigeria. The challenge is that the system has only been theoretically adopted by various governments; none have fully implemented it (Asiyai, 2013). The education system of the country is faced with a plethora of challenges – infrastructural decay, neglect, waste of resources, and sordid condition of service (Adekunle, 2019).

Statistically, Nigeria currently has over 10 million out-of-school children, with double the figure performing poorly in school (Adekunle, 2019). Given this, it is important to emphasize the relevance of education in Nigeria, which cannot be underestimated and overemphasized. Several scholars and key stakeholders across various fora have stressed the importance of education and have documented its significance (Obindah & Osara, 2019). These according to Obindah and Osara (2019) include that education in its entirety helps to satisfy the basic knowledge need of every human. This helps to provide a means of meeting other basic needs, helps to sustain, and accelerates aggregate development. Education helps to largely determine the level of employment and distribution of income for both present and future generations. Education helps to influence social welfare through its indirect effects on key variables such as - health, fertility as well as life expectancy.

In recognition of the overall relevance of education, global communities and governments have submitted that there must be commitments to ensure that every citizen has access to education. This is in the face of the global realization of the inequalities in terms of educational access cum the massive rate of absolute deprivation of education to children in Nigeria (Obindah & Osara, 2019). To address this challenge, the declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) at Jomtien, Thailand in 1996 emphasized that, every

person (child, youth, and adult) shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities to meet their basic needs. In furtherance of this declaration, there was a reaffirmation at the world summit for children in 1990 which reemphasized that all children have access to basic education by the year 2000 (Obindah & Osara, 2019). Despite this, the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria is on the increase, with little hope in sight of addressing the issue (Obindah & Osara, 2019).

Pre-Colonial Education in Nigeria. Before the arrival of the British colonizers on what is today known as Nigeria, two major types of education were in existence: formal and informal education. Formal religious education in the North was characterized by *mallams* heading the Qur'anic school, learning the Quran and Arabic alphabets through rote learning. This learning started at age five. Informal indigenous education, on the other hand, was common in the South where children were taught the practical skills to be functional members of society. These skills are based on gender and are mostly through observation and imitation. While the boys go to the farm with their fathers or learn crafts as apprentices, girls are made to learn the domestic chores and the skills to be a good wife and mother (Fafunwa, 2004). In doing this, they learned the customs and traditions of the society informally through socialization, belong to different age groups, and possessing kinship ties within the community (Fafunwa, 2004). Because it is seen to follow the Athenian form of education, physical skills were appreciated by the male (Fafunwa, 2004).

It is significant, however, to point out that the existence of this kind of education proves the lie in the assertions of certain Western scholars and observers of African studies. Particularly, it negates the claim of Trevor-Roper, the Oxford University-based professor of History who had asserted in the 1960s that Africa is “no historical part of the world; it has no movement or

development to exhibit... there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness are not the subjects of history” (Lamptey, 2012, p. 4). As previously noted, as a heterogeneous entity, Nigeria is rich and diverse in cultural values with about 500 ethnic groups and languages with the major ones being Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo (Amali & Jekayinfa, 2013) but Otite (1990) identified 374 ethnic groups.

The educational system in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria was predominantly an Islamic religious one because Northerners are Muslims. Unlike in the South where different communities have different cultural beliefs that affect the socialization/ education of the children, the Northerners had a uniform education policy that was anchored on Islam (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981). Traditional African education and formal religious education were prominently working before 1842 when the Christian missionaries arrived in the coastal area of the southern part of Nigeria and introduced western education (Imam, 2012). The coming of European (Western) education from the mid-nineteenth century onwards disrupted the traditional systems and brought a Western formal school system (Omolewa, 2007). It was, for this reason, Kehinde laments, that “western colonialism is not content with pillaging human and material resources to sustain and consolidate its power over its colonies; it has to destroy the indigenous cultures and values (religion, language, dressing codes, etc) and supplant them with distorted and ambivalent versions” (Kehinde, 2005 p.204)

History of British Colonial Education in Africa and Nigeria. As pointed out earlier, colonial education was not totally different from the informal education that was existing in Africa (Booth, 2002). The British did not have a standardized colonial school model, rather they adapted their colonial education systems to the colonial conditions (White, 1996). Therefore, the colonial education introduced was relative except that it was structured. This is to achieve their

religious and economic purposes of controlling Africa's intellectual mind (Okoli, 2007). Mart (2011) is very critical of the colonial education policy in Africa, saying that the colonizing countries gained control of the colonized nations not only through physical control but also mental control. The mental control was through education because education brings Africans to what they viewed as the civilized world.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Ozigi and Ocho (1981) observed that the Christian missionaries are never forgotten, because they do not only establish Christian schools for their ulterior motive but helped indigenous stories be developed into writing as well. An example of such is Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who translated the English Bible to Yoruba. This is made possible because of his exposure to western and religious education. Hence, colonial education policy helped in the promotion of the languages of the indigenous peoples (White, 1996) of Nigeria because Bibles and other religious texts are translated into local languages.

The diverse Nigerian society was established in 1914 when the Northern and Southern Protectorate was amalgamated by Sir Frederick Lord Lugard (Imam, 2012). The name, Nigeria means Niger area because of the presence of River Niger in the country. The amalgamation also necessitated the adoption of an indirect rule system that was successful in the North because their Monarchical head was like that in Swaziland (Fabunmi, 2005; Booth, 2002). Indirect rule was not very successful in the South of Nigeria and it caused the western education gap between the two protectorates that made up present-day Nigeria (Ogunsola, 1982). According to Durowaiye and Khan (2017), this has a lasting effect on the demography of education in Nigeria, as the Northerners have utilized Islamic education much more, which even suppresses the females. For example, Quranic schools could not benefit from grants-in-aid given to missions and other voluntary agencies' schools because of the peculiar curricula of the former (Imam, 2003). The

colonial government, therefore, had to take the responsibility of providing western education in the northern part of the country as the government needed vital personnel from amongst the natives to make the policy of indirect rule work (Ogunsola, 1982). This education also emphasized the domestication of females especially following the practice in existence.

After the Second World War, there arose the Nigerian Nationalist movement whose yearning was the need for self-government (Imam, 2012). Therefore, the period of 1944 to 1960 was a period of agitation by the nationalists for Nigeria's independence from the United Kingdom. This period was also a period of educational expansion (Imam, 2012). It was this prevailing circumstance that necessitated the Educational Ordinance of 1948, where the educational administration was reviewed and decentralized to evaluate the educational grants for 10 years by the appointed Director of Education (Fabunmi, 2005; Imam, 2012).

By 1963, after the colonial government had left the scene and Nigeria became a Republic, the number of primary schools in the Western Region of the country was 6,311. As of 1962, Lagos already had 120 primary schools while the Eastern Region had 6,654 by the year 1957. The accurate statistics for the Northern Regions are not available but a three-fold increase was said to have been recorded in the school population between 1948 and 1958 (Adetoro, 1966). The increase in the number of primary schools also dictated that more secondary schools were built to meet the growing needs.

As of October first, 1960, Nigeria's date of independence, only two tertiary institutions were available in Nigeria viz. Yaba Higher College (founded in 1934) and University College, Ibadan (founded in 1948) as the second university to be founded in Nigeria, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was formally opened on the seventh of October 1960 (Fajana, 1972). However, at independence, (Makozi & Ojo, 1982) observed that Nigeria inherited an educational system

that was academic with an emphasis on paper qualifications and the attainment of white-collar jobs even when students struggle financially and culturally to have access to this education (Durowaiye & Khan, 2017; Lewin 2009; Teferra & Altbach, 2003). One other negative legacy of colonial education was its discriminatory disposition towards the female gender, especially because of their need for skilled labor which made them reconsider the education system. Mart, 2011). Okoli (2007) posits that education favored boys since they are used to achieve the European's commercial purpose as the available job opportunities were mostly suitable for men while women are made to study home economics-oriented subjects (Booth, 2002).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the British colonial administration opted for a unified method in all the British colonies. Unlike the French that adopted a policy of assimilation, the British government adopted an indirect rule system whereby the head, especially the monarchs, were used to colonize the territories (White, 1996). Using Sierra Leone as the first example in West Africa, the British colonial education started in the 19th century with a group of British humanitarian philanthropists and abolitionists, who transported the first groups of liberated slaves in Britain to settle in the Sierra Leone Peninsula (Yasmina & Mostefaoui, 2019). They established churches and schools under the control of the Church Mission Society (CMS) intending to spread Christianity and the ethos of western civilization, culture, and education because they considered Sierra Leoneans as illiterates (Yasmina & Mostefaoui, 2019).

The British used the indirect rule system in many of their colonies and protectorates, including Nigeria, especially the Northern part of Nigeria. Similarly, considering women education in the British colony of Swaziland, Booth (2002) reported that the colonial administration could not cater meaningfully for the education of the women because it would affect the colonial authority's indirect rule system motive of using the strong Swazi's monarchs

that are already in place and well respected. This is like what is obtainable in Nigeria, especially in the North where Islamic religious practices and education are supreme. Besides, the Europeans themselves would have no moral justification to promote female education because of their patriarchal cultural background (Booth, 2002) which aligns with male hegemony in their colonies. Hence, formal education in the British colonies for women was geared towards domesticity (Booth, 2002). It kept women suppressed within the male dominance that already existed in the system.

According to Booth (2002), the same situation applied in South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe where education for women was geared towards making them limited to being domestic persons, the role which the traditional society had already permitted. Through this kind of education, the girls learned in a formal school setting that it was their duty to stay at home and cook, clean, and make healthy Christian children, respect, and obey their husbands. Considering British education in all the colonies and specifically in Nigeria, the British government worked with the missions who were already on the ground and integrated the people's culture into the colonial education process (White, 1996). In doing this, resource persons like Massai were used (Booth, 2002; White, 1996), women and agricultural education was prioritized, rational thinking was fostered to make the people see education as close to the truth (White, 1996). In Colonial Nigeria, some cities in the North established formal Islamic schools whereby they added math and science as subjects apart from the Arabic alphabets.

National Policy on Education in Nigeria. Until 1977, Nigeria's education policy followed forms established by Great Britain, the colonial power. The inability of this education policy to meet up with the national aspirations of the country made it largely unpopular (Okoroma, 2006). An effort to address this reality led to the 1969 National Curriculum

Conference, which was organized to review the inherited British curriculum and charter a new national educational goal for Nigeria's education system. Following this, there was a National Seminar organized by the National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1973 under the Chairmanship of Chief S. O. Adebayo (Okoroma, 2006). This birthed the NPE in 1977.

However, the NPE is solely anchored on Nigeria's philosophy on education which is synonymous with the nation's objectives (Okoroma, 2006). These objectives of Nigeria are provided by the Second National Development Plan (SNDP) and are widely accepted as the key structure for the NPE. The five objectives include:

- The building of a free and democratic society
- The building of a just and egalitarian society
- The building of a united strong and self-reliant nation
- The building of a great and dynamic economy
- The building of a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 1998).

The beginning of formal education in Nigeria signaled the articulation of these objectives. It was first formulated in 1977 resulting from the inaugural National Curriculum Conference (NCC) in 1973.

Higher Education in Nigeria. Higher education is referred to as “post-secondary or tertiary education is the education given after secondary education in colleges of education, monoteknic, polytechnics, universities and those institutions offering correspondence courses” (Federal Ministry of Education 2004, P.30). Because education is in the concurrent legislative list in Nigeria, both federal and state government oversees higher education in Nigeria.

Akinsanya (2011) in her quantitative survey analysis of Education Trust Fund (ETF) and National Universities Commission (NUC) documents discovered that, while there are federal universities, polytechnics, monotechnic, and colleges of education, there are state-owned ones as well with limited funding from the government. Although the National Policy on Education of the Federal Ministry of Education (2004) explicitly states that education is a government affair in which free education is to be provided by the government at all levels, there are privately owned institutions too in Nigeria, especially by the religious groups. This is because, until 1999, public universities had a near-monopoly in providing university education in Nigeria (Ajadi, 2010). The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) enhanced the market-friendly economy in the country, thereby promoting the establishment of private higher institutions in Nigeria. Currently, there are 147 federal public higher institutions, 277 state-owned public higher institutions and, 237 privately-owned institutions in the country (Ifedili, 2016). All these include universities, polytechnics/monotechnics, and colleges of education in Nigeria.

In terms of administration and quality control, the National Universities Commission (NUC) accredits courses and monitor universities in the country. National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) sees the affairs of polytechnics, and the National Council for the Colleges of Education (NCCE) monitors the affairs of the colleges of education in Nigeria (Onwunli & Agho, 2004). Internally and administratively, the university head is a vice-chancellor, the polytechnic is headed by a rector while the college of education is headed by a provost.

Having talked about the typology and administration of higher education in Nigeria, there is the need to talk about the goal of higher education as well. The specific goal of higher education in section eight subsection a-g is concerned with:

- the contribution to national development through high level and extension services
- relevant manpower training
- development and inculcation of proper values for the survival of training in the methods and techniques of teaching the individual and society
- developing the intellectual capability of individuals
- acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills that will enable individuals to be a self-reliant and useful member of the society
- promote national and international understanding.

Access and Equity of Higher Education to Nigerian Females. The historical and cultural narrative of higher education affects Nigerian females, especially with a focus on access and equity, as it demonstrates how British colonial education is programmed in line with the traditional system of educating females for domestication. It is this domestication of females that the British colonial masters relied on when they arrived at their various colonies, and Nigeria is not an exception. The colonizing countries are aware of using education to introduce their colonies to the superior culture and civilization as mentioned by Mart (2011), thereby enabling the colonizers to achieve their set out “social and economic control of the African people” (Mart, 2011 p. 190).

The history of education in Nigeria is a history of modern Nigeria itself. Education in this sense is strictly Western-styled formal education. It should be noted that before the advent of British colonialism in what is today the Federal Republic of Nigeria, there existed a form of education that had sustained the various peoples making up present-day Nigeria. This form of education has been widely termed traditional African education. Traditional African education is

part of the African people because they are socialized into it informally. It prepares the African child for learning that never stops (Omolewa, 2007), since learning itself is a continuum.

While there is a lot of research and publication on women's education, there seems to be a paucity of works that reflect the historical trajectory of women's access to higher education and link it to the feminist movement. This part of the literature review, therefore, seeks to contribute to knowledge in that regard as it would help not only in enhancing women's strategic access to higher education but can also promote a balance in feminist movement research between the West and the rest of the world.

Higher Education Access and Equity Challenges for Nigerian Females. Since higher education helps in developing the human and social capital of not just an individual but the nation (Durowaiye & Khan, 2017; Lebeau, 2008; Teferra & Altbach, 2003), the various goals of education in Nigeria are achievable if there is quality delivery of curriculum content, resources are provided, access and equity regardless of gender and financial background considered at the higher education level (Durowaiye & Khan, 2017; Lewin, 2009). Higher education of good quality in Nigeria is very necessary and critical to becoming competitive on a global scale (Asiyai, 2013). This is because education helps in achieving the socio-cultural, economic, and political development of a nation locally and internationally (Asiyai, 2013; Durowaiye & Khan, 2017). Success has not occurred yet because of the many constraints that beset it in Nigeria.

The many constraints that beset higher education are not peculiar to Nigeria alone but Africa as a whole (Teferra & Altbach, 2003). Some of these challenges include inadequate financial resources, unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism, sociocultural factors, brain drain, unstable curriculum, and overcrowded classrooms (Teferra & Altbach, 2003; Jibril, 2003; Durowaiye & Khan, 2017). Looking at access as a constraint, it is unimaginable that

“54 countries have no more than 300 institutions that fit the definition of a university” (Teferra & Altbach, 2004 p.3). Looking at this situation in Africa and placing Nigeria as a part of a whole, the extent to which the challenges will be greater and constitute an encumbrance to not just the country but the individuals in it are worrisome.

Specifically, Nigerian higher education has similar challenges to what is obtained in the whole of Africa, but the focus here is how the challenges affect females' access to higher education. According to Jibril (2003) in *African Higher Education; Nigeria*, funding is one of the major challenges of higher education in Nigeria. With this, the resources are not available. Students are made to pay certain fees, which some families are unable to afford because of their economic limitations. This affects the females' access to education in that some may be asked to learn a trade so that the male child of the family can be sponsored to school (Lewin, 2009; Durowaiye & Khan, 2017). According to Durowaiye & Khan (2017), the existing socio-cultural gender norms prevent girls' access to education since all their education ends in the kitchen and childbearing. Eweniyi and Usman (2013) mentioned how the female child is denied access to education in the northern part of Nigeria because of religious beliefs. Hence, the family's socioeconomic status, sociocultural background, religious beliefs, parents' education levels, experience, and exposure are the key factors that prevent Nigerian females' equity and access to higher education. Therefore, the interplay of gender-biased forces and role stereotyping with widespread poverty does not only keep many females out of school but also foster oppression and exploitation. (Makama, 2013).

Similarly, Durowaiye and Khan (2017) mention how access to higher education is gender-based, as it made females suffer because of the patriarchal nature of the society. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,

2013), the literacy rate of the Nigerian youth is 51 percent. Meanwhile, there is a gender gap in the literacy rate as there is a literacy rate of 41.4 percent for the female while the male's rate is 61.38 percent (UNESCO, 2013). These statistics demonstrate the outcomes of gender-based policies in Nigeria.

Onoriode (2014) also talks about the role and progress of women in higher education, but this progress is hindered because of access. He links the hitherto lack of access to higher education of the women to a mindset which saw only the men as the individual, as conceptualized in the thoughts of Western philosophers like John Locke, JJ Rousseau, and others. He buttresses his point by quoting Pateman (1988) that “only masculine beings are endowed with attributes and capacities necessary to enter into contracts, the most important of which is ownership of property in person; only men, that is to say, are individuals” (pp. 5-6). Potokri (2014) therefore submits that the limitedness of higher education to men is to the detriment of women. Hence, the history of women's entry into higher education is not a simple, linear story of women “storming the citadel of higher education” (Dyhouse, 1984, pp. 52) to a wonderful state of equal opportunities for all.

Despite the challenges Nigerian females face regarding access to higher education, some have been able to break these barriers by engaging in other money-making activities like make-up, modeling, home tutoring, and entrepreneurial skills acquisition (Durowaiye & Khan, 2017). In the same vein, Lebeau (2008) posits that since higher education is an elitist social status symbol marker in Nigeria, people, especially females, are also striving hard to attain this education. Higher education, therefore, is truly an investment that pays (Lebeau, 2008) even though society frowns at the education of females.

Feminism and Women Access to Higher Education in Nigeria. In the traditional and present-day Nigerian society, most ethnic groups assign to the man the role of breadwinner for his family. This role requires the males to seek formal training in a school that will enable them to secure employment in the modern sector, thereby equipping them to provide for the family and their parents in times of dire need (Obasi, 2000). By assigning men this role, women's education is seen as of little importance. Meanwhile, women are rising to the task of acquiring higher education against all odds. Potokri (2014) mentioned that she found out that women see the utilitarian value of education, measuring the challenges and the opportunity against cost. Therefore, the alternatives women had to forgo to enroll in higher education is an issue concerning their academic performance and success. As such, the acquisition of higher education is crucial to them.

Looking at women's sacrifices to attain higher education with a feminist lens in Nigeria may be linked to the radical feminist activism of second-wave feminism in the western world that is rooted in liberation (Woodhull, 2003). Just as there are different strokes for different folks, the issues faced by females differ from country to country. As such, the third-wave feminists need to globalize their perspective and not see any feminists as Third World Feminists (Woodhull, 2003; Fennel & Arnot, 2008).

Considering the historical context of females in Nigeria, and how far women have been able to empower themselves, like the establishment of Women in Nigeria (WIN), a transnational non-governmental organization that fights for the rights and liberation of peasant Nigerian women (Woodhull, 2003), is both impressive and amazing. Outsiders may not recognize the progress, we must also remember otherness in the feminist movement should be avoided since poverty is feminized across the globe (Woodhull, 2003). Because "feminism is something

individual to each feminist” (Woodhull, 2003, p.79), women across the globe need to be more supportive of other women’s movements especially feminists in the developing countries.

Parenting Style and Influence on Child Upbringing

From birth, children learn the traits to exhibit in their lifetime through socialization (Mensah, & Kuranchie, 2013). The home environment is the first point of socialization. According to Mensah and Kuranchie (2013), parents are the authoritative figure in the home and their parenting style has a lot of influence on the child’s socialization process. They inculcate what they perceive as worthwhile values in the child. In their mixed study research of using 480 elementary school students as participants, it was discovered that parenting style influences children’s social development. In this study, they identified four parenting styles.

The authoritative parenting style sets a high expectation and gives emotional support to the child, which helps the child to become an independent person (Baumrind, 1991; Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). This style of parenting gives room for reasoning and does not impose decisions on the child. The second parenting style is the permissive type of parenting. This style of parenting is accepting and condones all the yearnings and desires of the child (Maumrind, 1991). The parents let the child do whatever he/she wants at will, placing them as the active agent in their own decision making (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). The parent does not control the child, nor encourage the child to obey external standards. The authoritarian style is the third parenting style. This style sets rules, regulations, and codes of conduct for the child to adhere to (Baumrind, 1991). The parents give punitive measures when rules are disobeyed. The child is restricted and has no self-will to make decisions (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). It was concluded that “different parenting styles produce different character traits of children including those demonstrated at school” (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013 p. 123).

Theoretical Framework

Ogbu's Cultural-Ecology Theory (Ogbu, 1981). According to Ogbu's (1981) *Cultural-Ecological Theory of Child Development*, family child-rearing in a similar micro setting and subsequent adolescent socialization affects the development of instrumental competencies needed for the adult economic, political, and social role. Although these cultural imperatives and competencies vary according to culture, the cross-cultural comparison is appropriate in competence context. Due to this, the various challenges that beset Nigerian female citizens, most of which are culturally inclined are imposed on the females through socialization. The socialization process supports Ogbu's cultural-ecology theory of the importance of the environment on an individual's upbringing. In explaining human behavior, both personal and environmental factors are crucial (Lewin, 2013). Hence, "the child is bathed in a culture like fishes in the sea, but culture, as a concept, is even more shifting and elusive than water" (Greene, 1994, p.354). This cultural imperative has subsumed females to male counterparts in Nigeria.

Competence is crucial to Ogbu in this theory, especially cultural competence. Hence, competence is the ability to perform a culturally specified socially valued role and task in a society with the power to influence such a society (Ogbu, 1981; Ainsworth and Bell, 1941; Inkeles, 1968). Competence, therefore, may be acquired through socialization. In a male-dominated society like Nigeria, the females who are silenced have been socialized to see themselves as the weaker vessel and are vested mainly with domestic chores. This socialization process of fostering cultural competence is the beginning of the myriads of challenges that beset Nigerian women in their later life. The World Health Organization (2010) states that women in the globe generally are at the risk of violence at all stages of their lives, from the womb to the tomb. Therefore, women suffer one injustice or the other in every stage of their lives from birth

to death. African society, and Nigeria specifically, outlines the main role of the female as that of a daughter, sister, wife, and mother with no nonfamily goals allowed. With westernization and education, some of these roles are changing gradually, and women are no longer confined to their husband's kitchen and home. Westernization as a harbinger of women's identity development explains Ogbu's notion of social networks that impacts the methods and setting of childrearing since the world is now a global village.

Cultural Task and Competence. Here, Ogbu (1981) emphasizes instrumental competence that meets societal needs thereby making child-rearing techniques to inculcate these needs. These are cultural tasks that are appropriate to age, sex, and other criteria of distinction (Ogbu, 1981). In Nigeria, the child is socialized to accept this instrumental competence from childhood; based on sex, the girl child mostly suffers the ill-treatment. Because of the patriarchal society that Nigeria is in, "women are regarded as less[er] human beings, especially among the Igbos in South Eastern Nigeria" (Nwogu, 2015 p. 79). It should be noted that access to education is inhibited by gender issues, socio-cultural beliefs, and practices (Ogbuagu, 2009). Often, female children suffer from hardship when the family has limited financial means. As such, the male child is sent to the formal school while the female is sent to learn vocations like tailoring, trading, hairdressing to mention a few. As an apprentice, therefore, these young girls are abused sexually, physically, and even emotionally.

Since Ogbu further mentions that child-rearing is a culturally organized formula for inculcating competencies, the parenting pattern of Nigerian parents corroborates this. For example, in Nigeria, especially in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, having a girl child is regarded as having no child (Nnadi, 2013). Hence, a girl in the household is already culturally socialized to see herself as a nobody, and she grows with this mentality. Part of the culturally

organized formula is that traditionally, women are excluded from ownership of landed property which is culturally the exclusive preserve of men. This is especially common among the Yorubas and the Igbos (Nwogu, 2015). Not only are women prevented from owning land, but automobile ownership is also restricted as well. They are also prevented from inheriting properties from their father or husband among the Igbos.

Effective Environment. To get an accurate view of instrumental competence, Ogbu (1981) talked about the role of an effective environment which includes the population's level of technology and knowledge of available resources. In the Nigerian context, this may serve as the various educational processes exposed to the girl child in fighting for her rights in society. The need to see herself as a relevant human being and not less human. Netting (1968) sees knowledge as the people's understanding of their environment and the techniques for exploiting its resources. In Nigerian women's case, they can harness the provision of the constitution on their fundamental human rights as entrenched in the constitution. Exposure to the provision of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could also help them in this regard. This would help in their identity development as Nigerian females.

Native Theory of Success. Although Ogbu sees the native theory of success as an important element that influences child-rearing, this may not help the female child in this regard except if she will look forward to the older men because of the societal importance of men. There is a saying that *poverty has women's faces* especially because of their low income. McFadden (1997) mentions how poverty silences women. This is because women are not paid on an equal basis with the male. They are also restricted to doing some works and in the Northern part of Nigeria, the secluded females are not allowed to engage in any money-making activities. As a result of this, women, therefore, lack the willpower to participate in administrative activities in

the home and the country at large. Even when they are doing great jobs and fostering development at the local level, women leaders have no funding made available for them to publicize what they are doing which will eventually attract more empowerment and help for them. This could be corroborated in Agbaje (2019) that the Nigerian women suffer from political illiteracy, which is relative to their seclusion from the political arena and sphere of decision-making. Intellectually, a higher proportion of Nigerian men goes to a school than women, thus neither female participation in forming nor administering the government is yet matured. Perhaps, religion and tradition are used as instruments of women's oppression in Nigeria (Abubakar, 2017).

Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1963). Erikson (1968) is the most influential theorist on ego identity. He sees it as a means for continuity of the person (Levesque, 2011). He defined identity as a sense of self because it helps in protecting individuals in the face of change and situational factors in a developmental manner. To Erikson, the developmental process of a healthy personality is emphasized. His focus is on crisis and how resolving or not resolving the crisis at each developmental stage affects the child's future development (Erikson, 1963). Although this theory draws on Freud's theory, Erikson's theory is universally acceptable because he acknowledged the importance of social interactions at each age period with expanded awareness to the entire life span (Bang, 2020). While this theory lacks testability and characterizes female identity in young adulthood, the relevance of this theory to my study cannot be overemphasized.

For example, at the infant stage of trust and mistrust, a girl child may be given the maximum comfort but with minimal trust because she is a girl. This would prevent the child from having hope in herself and the environment thereby contributing to her shame and doubt

with little or no autonomy as a toddler. The preschooler age encompasses the ability of the child to initiate ideas and activities, identify with parents, and develop a conscience and sexual identity to attain purpose and direction. The crisis in this stage is between initiative and guilt, which the child takes to the next stage of either being industrious or having an inferiority complex at the school-age (Erikson, 1963).

Graduating from the school-age is the critical adolescent age, where the child tries to integrate many roles to develop self-image by emulating a role model or by peer pressure. The crisis at this stage is between identity and role confusion, thereby leading to either fidelity or devotion. Resolving the crisis at the adolescent age prepares the individual for young adulthood, where intimacy clashes with isolation. At this stage, the ability to be committed to significant others is key to foster love and affiliation.

In Nigeria, due to the collective nature, the adult does have to include the extended families as significant others. This makes it challenging for a woman to enjoy her matrimonial home because of the prying eyes and demands of the *self-acclaimed significant others*. This situation develops to either stagnation or generativity in middle-age adulthood, where one seeks satisfaction and productivity in career and family. The success at this stage leads to care and production and it prepares the individual for older adulthood. If the child lacks trust as an infant, this has a way of influencing the child's ego and integrity as an older adult, because each of the eight-crisis periods builds on the other in a chronological but interrelated manner (Erikson, 1963).

Chapter Summary

This chapter encapsulates the patriarchal system in Nigeria, the history of education in Nigeria with a focus on women's education, and how higher education helps in identity building.

From the relevant literature reviewed, it can be understood that the denial of women's access to education did not start with the British colonial masters. The indigenous education on the ground has given way for this. What the colonial masters did was to build upon the existing system to achieve their religious and economic motive.

Post colonially, this gender gap in education still exists in Nigeria but with globalization, education, and exposure, some women are breaking the shackles and more women have access to higher education as compared to what was obtainable in the past. Even though male and cultural entitlement are still somewhat affecting Nigerian women negatively, the extent to which education is helping to eradicate this cannot be overemphasized. The concept of Education for All (EFA) is also helpful in breaking the barrier of women's access to education (Fennell & Arnot, 2008).

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter explains the research design for my study, a qualitative approach focused on Hermeneutical phenomenology. This approach involved female participants reflecting on the various challenges they experience in the patriarchal Nigerian society. The participants did not think about these aspects of their culture as challenges until they had a chance to reflect on them critically during the interview for this study. They shared stories of how education has helped them build their identities and self-esteem in a male-centered Nigerian society. Ogbu's Cultural ecological theory (1981) and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1963) were used as a foundational framework to organize the interview questions as they relate to the participants' lived experiences. The participants were 19 Nigerian women living in Nigeria, United States, and the United Kingdom (Scotland). They were selected using a convenience sampling type of purposive sampling. Each of the interviews lasted between 40-90 minutes. Interviews were then transcribed and coded for themes. Major themes are backed up by interview data to answer the three research questions for my study. Research reliability, limitations are discussed and ended with the chapter summary.

Research Questions

For my study, I am interested in providing answers to the following research questions;

- a. What challenges do female Nigerians face in the Nigerian education system?
- b. What stories do Nigerian women share about any special steps they have taken to empower themselves?
- c. What do Nigerian women see as the role of education in their identity development?

Introduction

Considering Levesque-Lopman's (1988) perspective on women-centered research, this study sees women as the social actors (research participants) with emphasis on their individual lived experiences as Nigerian women. Following this, a qualitative phenomenological research method was adopted. Because qualitative research is naturalistic and contextual (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Creswell, 2007), the use of descriptive data became important. The descriptive data helped me as the researcher to reason inductively, make meaning of the lived experiences of Nigerian females in the patriarchal Nigerian society (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

The specific approach adopted is a hermeneutic phenomenological method. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach of qualitative research is concerned with describing and interpreting the reason that people's lived experiences occur by recognizing and interpreting such lived experiences (Fuster Guillen, 2019). Since it deals with lived experiences, it is subjective because the researcher would only interpret what the participants deem fit to share as part of their lived experiences. In this study, I explored the subjective lived experiences of Nigerian women in the face of sociocultural challenges. I also considered how they overcame these challenges by acquiring higher education, build their self-esteem and identity afterward.

The participants selected are all females who are doing well (according to the participants during the interview) in their respective life endeavors. They were selected using convenience sampling and interviews conducted remotely through the Zoom cloud meeting platform. The interview protocols were constructed based on the conceptual frameworks of Ogbu's Cultural-ecological theory and Erikson's theory of Psychosocial development. For the interview, I negotiated the time and day of the interview according to the participant's schedule and

convenience. I transcribed the Interviews, coded for themes, and then major themes emerged through the transcribed interview data.

Methodology: Hermeneutic Phenomenological Method

I conducted this research as a qualitative study using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of several individuals about a phenomenon by focusing on what the research participants have in common about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This entails how people perceive and understand an experienced phenomenon (Husserl, 1999) mostly with the use of interviews to explore the details of how the participants are experiencing the phenomenon (Christensen & Johnson, 2016; Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). In this study, the phenomenon is identity building by Nigerian women. The choice of phenomenological study is designed to delve into how higher education has helped in building the identity and self-esteem of Nigerian women despite the sociocultural barriers.

A phenomenological research goal is to describe what people experience and how it was experienced (Creswell, 2007; Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019) to make it a reflective intentional activity (Smith, 2006). Since phenomenology deals with human construction and subjectivity (Fuster Guillen, 2019), the research participants were aware of what they will be interviewed on but no clue of the questions they would be asked. The interview was semi-structured and open-ended for them to think through the experiences as they affected them. Because the sociocultural challenges the participants face in their identity-building through higher education is the focus of my research, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used for this study.

Etymologically, hermeneutics is a Greek word *hermeneuein* that means “to interpret”. Hence, hermeneutics is an interpretive phenomenology in search of

understanding others through conversation. It originated from the works of Martin Heidegger (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Fuster Guillen, 2019). Focusing on human lived experiences, hermeneutics deals with the relationship between a person and his/her lifeworld (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). The notion of lifeworld makes everyone's realities different (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019) because people experiences are different. The different lived experiences of people lead to a diverse understanding of their situations explicitly. Hermeneutics is a descriptive expression of how an individual understands and translates an experience using an explicit statement interpretatively (Husserl, 1999; Lavery, 2003; Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Fuster Gullien, 2019). Therefore, as a researcher, I was cognizant of how the participants' backgrounds affected each participant's lived experience and how it was talked about during the interview (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). Because the hermeneutics process is historical and philosophical as it pertains to human's lived experiences (Lavery, 2003), the experiences of my research participants were interpreted based on their current individual experiences and what has happened historically to impact those experiences or the participants themselves (Ark, 2020). In this study, the lived experiences of the research participants were diverse, with similarities in how their gender determined their upbringing, lifestyle, and career choice. Therefore, the interpretation of these experiences was linked to the theoretical framework of their cultural ecology and psychosocial development to emphasize the role of *nature* and *nurture* in their lived experiences.

Phenomenological Reduction. Since the phenomenological method requires participants' reflection on their lived experiences, the researcher needs to suspend her

forms of assumption regarding the phenomenon to attain the true essence of the phenomenon as propounded by Husserl (Schmitt, 1959). The process of suspending assumptions to avoid making judgments is a phenomenological reduction and it was introduced by Husserl (Schmitt, 1959). As a researcher, I reflected on the phenomenon of identity building by Nigerian females (including my experiences), but I was neutral to avoid assumptions. In my neutrality, I allowed the participants to be expressive and share their lived experiences by making the interview open-ended. To get into the details of the participants' lived experiences which are diverse but related (in the case of my study), I as a researcher avoided all forms of individual assumptions and biases to study the phenomenon objectively as it was narrated by the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019).

Epoché and Researcher's Bias. Epoché is a phenomenological term that means judgment suspension (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). It means that prejudgment, biases, and preconceived ideas are limited for things and events to be experienced consciously (Moustakas, 1994). To achieve the process of phenomenological reduction, I used epoché in this study. I did this by acknowledging my biases as a Nigerian woman who has carved a niche for herself due to the acquisition of higher education despite the socio-cultural challenges. I understand that I cannot be out of the research, which I think is not necessary to do so, I used the epoché process to accept my preconceptions and biases. This I did by making a conscious effort of personal awareness in the research as I was open to the responses given by the participants to the questions asked. It helped me not to impose my opinion on the participants or the data analysis.

With a full understanding of phenomenology as research that deals with people's lived experiences, I want to state my researcher's bias by sharing my lived experience as a young Nigerian woman and how it affected this study. Growing up in a traditional home (both parents are present in the household) with a semi-literate parent in the urban city of Lagos, I did not consciously experience *biased/unequal* treatment as a girl. My parents treated us equally regardless of our gender. As such, I am not aware of any female oppression or being silenced when I was growing up. My high school experiences also helped me. I went to only girls' schools which further boosted my confidence as a high school girl then and till now. This is because of the various disciplines inculcated in us by our then principal. I remember how she would tell us to be lady-like in our endeavors. Every Friday, there was always an assembly to enlighten us by bringing speakers who are successful females in society and who are graduates of my high school. One of the speakers was the first female pilot in Nigeria. This served as a motivation for me as a female and developed my charisma.

I had the freedom to choose the career I wanted, and that made me stay home longer before gaining admission into the tertiary institution. I had wanted to be a lawyer or mass communicator, even though my parents wanted me to be a teacher. I ended up as a teacher not because of my parents' influence but because of my inability to get admission to those departments I wanted due to the admission requirements. As an undergraduate at the University of Lagos with a major in Education, I experienced close monitoring and pampering from my parents which I later realized was because of my gender as a female. The reason they gave me was that they wanted me to have everything that I needed so that I can focus on my studies and that no man would deceive me with material things.

I must say that I started reading meaning to my lived experiences after literature reviews on how Nigerian females face many socio-cultural challenges. Then, I remembered how my in-laws complained about me due to my level of education and my attitudes towards them. The treatment I received from my in-laws was like the lived experiences of many of my research participants. During the interviews, some of the participants talked about how they were treated by their in-laws, especially mothers-in-law, and as a researcher, I was only nodding and could not talk much since I experience such too. Yet, I was passive to be neutral and get a piece of detailed information for my research.

The peak of my lived experience as a Nigerian woman was during the time I was trying to conceive, there were lots of attitudes and sentiments from everywhere as if women are the only ones that have issues when it comes to child-rearing. While I tried to ignore whatever they were all saying and focus on my career at that moment, it was a herculean task for me as every accusing finger was pointed at me for not being a fulfilled woman. A fulfilled woman according to them and the culture was one who has children (biological children). No one cared if I was happy or if my spouse and I had planned on when to have a child. They never bothered if we even had the resources to take care of the child. All they were after was “just give us children since you are married”. This story is important to mention in this research as a part of the disclosure because it illustrates my own lived experience as a Nigerian woman. This is crucial to remember as I write and analyze the lived experiences of the participants. I also did not allow my experiences to interfere with theirs. I cannot categorically say that my experiences did not influence this study, I believe that I was objective enough to step away from inserting my experiences in transcribing and analyzing the data. I asked for clarifications from the participants to avoid misunderstanding their intended meanings during the interview. I was also fortunate to

have participants who experienced the phenomenon in a seemingly similar way, and this helped me to step away from the study as a researcher.

This phenomenological study was conceptualized to explore the identity building and self-esteem of Nigerian females through the acquisition of higher education. Therefore, it is hoped that Nigerian women will see the value of higher education in giving themselves a voice, and not just education for domesticity while they describe their experiences as Nigerian females.

Research Design

Based on the hermeneutic phenomenological framework, I used a semi-structured interview. This enabled the research participants to fully express themselves explicitly about their experiences regarding identity building with sociocultural challenges in a male-centered Nigerian society. The human subjects in this study were interviewed to identify and share their lived experiences as female Nigerians and what it takes to build their identity through higher education. The purpose of using a phenomenological approach is to “develop a structural description of their experiences in terms of the conditions, situations, or context to convey an overall essence of their experiences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Conducting semi-structured interviews allowed for follow-up with clarifying questions to explore the variety of themes that emerged in each interview since I fully anticipated a variety of unique experiences from each participant as it related to the theoretical framework and literature review under consideration. Some of the interview protocols were concerned with how the participants were treated when they were growing up; the challenges they faced as females, and how they overcame these challenges. Questions relating to their career choice were further linked to how successful they think they were and how education has helped them in achieving this. Relatively, they were

asked to talk about what they thought about their culture with cognizance of their gender. The role of their education and career in their self-esteem were also asked.

Although contemporary phenomenological researchers mentioned having a long interview with about ten participants (Groenewald, 2004), I had 19 participants for my study since Polkinghorne (1989, as cited in Creswell, 2007) mentioned five to 25 participants. I used 19 because of my purposive convenience sampling technique. This gave me room to reach out to many willing participants and I was ready to take advantage of this to make me aware of how the participants were experiencing the phenomenon under study. In the same vein, the choice of this number of participants was linked to the diverse nature of the Nigerian society with each culture suppressing females differently. Hence, the nature of my research participants cut across the different groups in a good number, and the interview was conversational. I made the interview conversational because my interview protocols were as unstructured as possible. I made it semi-structured to enable the participants to share their lived experiences explicitly and allow me to seek clarity back and forth during the interview. During the research process, I took some memos to note some observations and link instances of personal connection to the research (Christensen & Johnson, 2016). This was important to me as a researcher because I am connected to the phenomenon as a Nigerian woman who has a lived experience of the phenomenon being researched. Yet, I do not want to interpret the interview from a personal experience.

Participants and Site Location

For this study, I adopted a purposeful sampling strategy in selecting the participants. I used this strategy because, Nigerian women who are the research participants have a purposeful

understanding of the various challenge Nigerian women face, strive to get a higher education, and build their self-esteem. Specifically, I adopted the convenience sampling technique of purposeful strategy. Convenience sampling is the collection of data from participants who are conveniently available to participate in the study (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), this technique saves time, money, and effort but obtained information may not be reliable or valid. My choice of this sampling technique was because of my inability to travel to different parts of the world where the participants were because of traveling and time constraints as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the internet has been very convenient to conduct this study. Hence, I used my social capital to reach out to friends, families, and mentors. I told them about my research during our conversations and some of them showed interest. In the end, 21 people expressed interest in participating before the IRB approval. When the study started, only 19 participants were readily and conveniently available. The other two participants were not available because of schoolwork and communication issue.

Since phenomenological study can have participants between five and 25, this study, therefore, included a total of 19 participants. These participants were graduates, undergraduates, professionals, and unprofessional Nigerian ladies/women. The working-class Nigerian women in this context were those who felt they were not professionally successful or those who were not using their higher education degree now to earn a living. Those who were yet to complete their higher education at the time of the interview due to one circumstance or the other that was beyond them.

The Nigerian women who participated in this study included an educational consultant/ proprietress, and Nigerian women studying abroad (USA and Scotland); as well as accountants,

nurses, biochemists, economists, child psychologists, statisticians, teachers both in Nigeria and abroad were also involved in the study. The purpose of the diverse selection of these participants was to help me explore the divergent views of the different lived experiences of these women.

Table 1: Participants' Demographics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Current Location	Highest Qualification	Field of study	Occupation
Olams	28	Yoruba	Married	Osun, Nigeria	B.Sc., M.Sc. in Progress	Biochemistry	Schooling
Chia	Late 20s	Igbo	Single	Ohio, USA	M.Ed.; Ph.D. in Progress	Education	Schooling
Deea	33	Yoruba	Single	Ohio, USA	M.A; Second M.A in progress	English Literature/Arts	Schooling; Teaching Assistant
Dula	37	Yoruba	Single	Port-Harcourt, Nigeria	M.Ed.	Education	Teaching
Iwao	26	Yoruba	Single	Ohio, USA	B.Sc.; M.Sc. in Progress	Biochemistry	Schooling
Onons	36	Igbo	Married	Scotland, UK	M.Ed.	Education	Teaching
Babs	32	Edo	Married	Florida	SSCE	Sciences	Nurse
Eyis	N/A	Yoruba	Single	Lagos, Nigeria	M.A; Second M.A in progress	Arts; English	Schooling
Alew	33	Yoruba	Married	New Jersey, USA	B.Ed.	Education; Special Education- Guidance & Counselling	Behavior Technician
Yora	25	Yoruba	Single	Ohio, USA	M.A; Second masters in progress	Arts; English	Schooling
Emem	N/A	Yoruba	Married	Lagos, Nigeria	HND	Accounting	Accountant
Owok	N/A	Yoruba	Married	Lagos, Nigeria	B.Sc.	Economics	Economist
Neko	N/A	Igbo	Single	Ohio, USA	M.Sc.	Statistics	Statistician
Shia	24	Yoruba	Single	Ohio, USA	B.Sc.; M.Sc. in progress	Sciences; Biochemistry	Schooling
Funo	N/A	Yoruba	Married	Florida, USA	M.A; Ph.D. in progress	Arts; English Literature	Schooling/teaching
Mijo	26	Warri/Delta	Single	Lagos, Nigeria	B.Ed.	Education	N/A
Lata	30s	Yoruba	Single	Louisiana, USA	B.A; M.A in progress	Arts; Linguistic Anthropology	Schooling
Math	N/A	Yoruba	Married	Lagos, Nigeria	M.Sc.	Sciences; Maths, Computer Science	Proprietress
Oyins	N/A	Yoruba	Married	Ibadan, Nigeria	B. A	Arts; Theater Arts	Freelance communicator

Procedure

In mid-June of 2020, I applied for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to use human subjects for my qualitative research. Because my study poses no threat to humans, and due to the pandemic, I applied for an expedited review. While waiting for the IRB approval, I was already recruiting participants informally since I used convenience sampling. Another reason for informing them earlier was because of the uncertainties that the pandemic kept causing. On August 31, I obtained IRB approval for my research and I started reminding the willing participants about the study that I had earlier discussed with them. This was easy because everything was remotely done through emails, Facebook chats, WhatsApp, phone calls, and Zoom. During this time, I was patient and consistent in reaching out to the participants because most participants took time/ days to reply to my messages.

Immediately after receiving IRB approval in August, I started calling, texting, chatting, and emailing some of them again to fix the time and day for the remote interview on the Zoom Cloud meeting. I chose Zoom to enhance the easy recording of the interview. In the first week of September, I had already scheduled 12 participants while the other nine were scheduled later. I had the first interview on September 2, 2020, and as of September 25, I had done 19 interviews. In late October, I heard back from the other two participants who were unable to participate in the study because of time, their busy schedule, and internet issue. While scheduling for the interviews, we had a series of conflicting schedules, but I was able to negotiate with them because of my relationship with most of the participants. I sent the fliers to them so that they would have official documentation and a well-informed idea of what the study was about. There was no need to send a hard copy of the consent form as this was planned to be done aurally (listen while I read the consent) since the interview was remotely conducted.

Before starting an interview with any participants, I usually asked them if they had any questions regarding the topic, read the consent to them, and if they were willing to participate in the interviews. I also informed them that I would record the interviews and they were free to turn off the camera if they so desired. After they said “yes” to signify their intention to participate in the interview (consent), I turned on the recording button, and the semi-structured interviews were conducted as stated in my instruments and protocol. All participants made themselves available at the scheduled time, used their data and computer at no cost to me except for one participant who had to remove herself from the study as a result of communication issues. I also did not offer them any gifts or compensation except telling them “thank you” after the interview. When I completed the research, I sent them text messages to appreciate them for participating in my study. They were all happy to be part of my study. This was because they were happy to support me since most of them were aware of my career journey. I was able to conduct 19 interviews in less than four weeks.

The sampling technique was convenience sampling with the use of an interview. The semi-structured interview was virtual via Zoom cloud meeting to enable easy recording. The interview covered topics like the upbringing of the participants, the participants purpose of attaining higher education, challenges they encountered as Nigerian women and how education has helped in their identity development. Appendix A has the complete list of the interview questions.

Personal information collected from participants in this study included educational level, family number, jobs, and country of residence. These personal data were encoded in numbers and stored on a secure online server, which utilized server authentication and data encryption technology. Transcribed data were kept in a password-protected database, with access

limited to me and my supervisor only. Only pseudonyms were also used in published reports. Whenever I quoted a participant directly, I changed some of their personal identifying details to protect confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedure. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and proofread. Building on the data relating to the identified research questions, the data were analyzed highlighting the significant statements and quotes that provided an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of identity building as female Nigerians (Creswell, 2007). This according to Moustakas (1994) is called horizontalization. After transcription, I tried to do an initial member check of the data to verify with participants the accuracy of the transcribed data, but I only got back from six participants. Others were busy but apologized for their inability to proofread. They all accepted to answer any follow-up questions and clarifications I may have had. As such, a cluster of meanings from the participants' significant statements was developed into themes (Creswell, 2007) with the use of emergent themes to construct a descriptive-analytical coding of the interview.

To support the data that I got from the interview, I used my literature review and the theoretical frameworks adopted for my study. These two theories (Ogbu's ecological theory and Erikson's theory of psychosocial development) were used because of the influence of childhood upbringing in the participants' identity building. Some key elements/ words in the theories were incorporated into the interview questions to enhance a reflective process in the participants during the interview. I was also doing a regular member check to better understand the intended meaning of most statements uttered by the participants.

Coding. After the interview transcription, I proofread after reaching out to research participants who were available to proofread. I read the transcripts again for initial coding. I

considered my research questions in line with my theoretical frameworks and literature review to do the coding. For my research questions, I analyzed the data thematically on excel, sorted the identified codes, and put relevant quotes in quotation marks. I used the first reading to generate initial codes like “home environment”, “literacy”, “upbringing”, “cultural beliefs”. After the coding, I started generating the common themes and sorted the relevant quotes as well on an excel worksheet for easy organization. The generated themes were used for my research result/ findings and discussion. (See Table 2 for initial codes and final collated themes).

Table 2: Themes, Codes, and Sub-themes

Themes	Initial Codes	Refined Codes	Sub-themes
Home environment and upbringing	<i>All females. All Nigerians, based in Nigeria, Scotland, and United States. Single and married. Illiterate, semi-literate, literate parents. Lower, middle, upper social class. Gender stereotype, Gender bias, Gender inequality, Gender equity, Gender Orientation, Gender education, Gender discrimination. Independent, Cordial. Influenced, Semi-influenced, Choice, Compelled. Authoritarian, Disciplinarian, Permissive</i>	<i>Nigerians. Single, Married. Illiterate, Literate. Lower, Middle, Upper. Gender Stereotype, Gender bias, Gender inequality, Gender equity, Gender oriented, Gender education, Gender discrimination. Independent, Cordial. Influenced, Choice, Compelled. Authoritarian, Disciplinarian; Permissive.</i>	<i>Parent's education and parenting style, gender treatment at home, exposure, and socioeconomic status</i>
Nigerian education and its impact on women empowerment	<i>HND, B.Sc., B.Sc. in view, B.A., B.A. in view, M.Sc., M.Sc. in view, M.A., M.A. in view, PhD. in view, undisclosed. Economic sustainability, Goal actualization, Career progression, Exposure, Family pressure; Societal pressure; Peer influence. Sociocultural, Finance, Gender stereotype, Gender bias, Gender inequality, Economic instability, Lack of parental support, Teenage pregnancy, Systemic problem, Bureaucracy, Cultural belief, Cultural stereotype, Societal stereotype, Societal pressure, Sexual harassment, Threat, Marital life, Patriarchy. Enrolment procedures; Learning and instructional facilities; Funding; Leadership crisis.</i>	<i>HND, B. Sc., B. A., M.Sc., M. A., Ph.D. Economic sustainability, Goal actualization, Career progression, Exposure, Family pressure, Societal pressure, Peer influence. Socio-cultural, Finance, Gender Stereotype, Gender bias, Economic instability, Systemic problem, Cultural belief, Cultural stereotype, Sexual harassment, Marital life, Patriarchy.</i>	<i>Qualification and its impact, motivation for attaining education, Educational challenges, Nigerian higher education challenges</i>
Overcoming educational challenges for career inspiration	<i>Challenging, Societal pressure, Family pressure, Work environment, Career procedure/requirement, Gender stereotype, Gender bias, Gender inequality, Policy. Passionate, Supportive husband, Determined, Hardworking, Contented, Accommodating, Disciplined, Parental support, Fulfilled, Confident, Outspoken, Firm, Enthusiastic, Socially aware, Human relations, Goal getter.</i>	<i>Societal pressure, Family pressure, Career procedure, Gender stereotype, Gender bias, Policy. Passionate, Supportive husband, Determined, Hardworking, Contented, Disciplined, Parental support, Confident, Firm, Enthusiastic, Human relations, Goal getter.</i>	<i>Sociocultural challenges and career inspiration, overcoming challenges, professional life/fulfillment</i>
Overarching themes around culture and gender stigma		<i>Social pressure, peer pressure, property acquisition, education, beliefs, and traditions</i>	<i>Homogeneity vs heterogeneity, cultural competence, cultural vs family value, cultural challenges, and stereotypes</i>

Education-Empowering women identity	<i>Professional, Independent, Exposure, Gender oriented, Enlightened, Fulfilled, Committed, Passionate, Human relations, Calm, Courteous, Educated, Creative, Open, Informed, Respect, Determined, Self-motivated, Self-confidence, Confident, Constructive, Socialisation, Social relations, Self-awareness, Phlegmatic, Introvert, Contented, Unique, Honest.</i>	<i>Professional, Independent, Exposure, Gender oriented, Enlightened, Fulfilled, Committed, Passionate, Human relations, Calm, Courteous, Educated, Creative, Open, Informed, Respect, Determined, Self-motivated, Self-confidence, Confident, Constructive, Socialisation, Social relations, Self-awareness, Phlegmatic, Introvert, Contented, Unique, Honest.</i>	<i>Human agency, forming an independent identity</i>
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Trustworthiness of the Study

The subjective nature of qualitative research means that there is no validity in objective truth (Maxwell, 2013). Rather, the validity threat can be identified from data collected and the sampling technique adopted. Therefore, the goal of my phenomenological study was to identify the essence of the subjective truth in the lived experiences of female Nigerians as they build their identities through higher education. I collected my phenomenological research data from first-person accounts of the participants' experiences who are Nigerian women. Since member check is one of the sources of triangulation to enhance internal validity (Merrick, 1999), I used member check consistently in my study to validate my data for my research reliability. In ensuring that there was no misrepresentation of participant experiences, I did verbal, informal member checks by summarizing periodically during the interview and asking for confirmation that the paraphrase was a correct understanding of what the participants meant.

I completed an additional member check for accuracy when the written transcription of the audio-recorded interview was returned to six participants to verify and confirm accuracy. I verified the other 13 through conversations because of their busy schedules. I ensured the trustworthiness of my data through phenomenological epoché by blocking all my biases and judgment suspensions about the phenomenon of identity building by Nigerian women. I analyzed the data to get the inherent meanings that were intended by the participants.

Additionally, in my role as a researcher who has experienced a bit of the phenomenon, I developed a full and diverse understanding of the everyday lived experiences of the participants. By collecting data from my large number of participants who shared their experiences, my observation of their body language and facial expressions, non-formal conversations after the interviews, there was a greater chance of credibility and trustworthiness in the data I collected.

Limitations of the Study

Ethical Limitations. The first limitation of this study is ethical which centered on the researcher's involvement with the participants. This is because most of the participants are the researcher's allies and mentors. This made it challenging for the participants to discuss some personal things during the interview because of the personal relationship they have with the researcher. I maintained my position as a researcher, I attempted to encourage participants to participate in the research and be open-minded, some of the participants still found it challenging to discuss some experiences as they saw those experiences as personal. Despite this, I made them comfortable and assured them that there was confidentiality and pseudonyms will be used instead of their names.

Because the interview was remotely conducted, there were internet issues with Nigerian participants. What I did in this regard was to interview at midnight (in Nigeria) since that seems to be when their network was good. There were many distractions as well with some of the participant's children disrupting during the interview. In such instances, I usually mute and pause the recording. Then, we continue when they finished taking care of their children.

As with any qualitative research, transcribing the recorded interviews was a greater challenge especially with some participants code-mixing and codeswitching between English and their native languages. While transcribing, I interpreted the ones I knew (Yoruba language) but

had to reach out to the participants to interpret the ones I do not know especially the Igbo language and some idiomatic expressions. This was time-consuming because I had limited time to complete the research.

Methodological Limitation. Phenomenological methodology is well suited to understand participants lived experiences because participants can describe their lived experiences. However, there may have been a tendency for the 19 participants to describe whatever they were comfortable sharing with me as a researcher and hid the rest of the experiences from me. Because of this, I had to be careful not to probe into the private affairs that they do not wish to make public. Hence, they may have shared their experiences more positively or negatively depending on how they reflected on those experiences within the context of their life situations now.

Chapter Summary

This phenomenological research methodology was designed to help explore the identity development of Nigerian women through higher education. It was designed to answer these research questions: what challenges do female Nigerians face in the Nigerian education system; what stories do Nigerian women share about any special steps they have taken to empower themselves; and what do Nigerian women see as the role of education in their identity development? The choice of a phenomenological study was due to my interest in collecting and understanding the lived experiences of Nigerian women who have used higher education to their advantage. They did not use the education they acquired for mere domestication as cultural enthusiasts to be culturally competent. Convenience sampling was used to save time and cost. There were 19 participants for the study, and they were interviewed between 40 and 90 minutes. Results were codified and sorted into themes. I used literature review, Ogbu and Erikson's

theoretical frameworks to support my interview data. The researcher's bias, participant selection, and time constraints were the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter covers the findings and discussion of the various themes that emerged from my data as they relate to my research question. In doing this, I contextualized the 19 participants' lived experiences by describing their demographics, upbringing, education career, and professional life as they help in the generation of overarching themes and codes used in the discussion section. The phenomenology of this study focused on the lived experiences of the female participants as well as their identity development through higher education. This led to the use of lengthy quotes from the interviews as a way of giving a voice to the participants. It also helps to describe their various experiences as an individual to enhance a collective discussion of the findings with cognizance of the theoretical frameworks. The generated themes are discussed and synthesized using the theoretical frameworks that are in line with the research questions which are:

1. What challenges do female Nigerians face in the Nigerian education system?
2. What stories do Nigerian women share about any special steps they have taken to empower themselves?
3. What do Nigerian women see as the role of education in their identity development?

The first section of this chapter gives a brief introduction of each theme and sub-themes regarding the lived experiences of the participants. The second section covers the discussion of the various themes and sub-themes in detail while the third and final section outlines the discussion of findings with the research questions and the theoretical framework of Ogbu and Erikson with relevant literature.

Theme One: Home Environment and Upbringing

The stories from the participants showed that the home environment is where instrumental competence and hope are first developed in the child. When talking about their home environment and upbringing, many of the participants talked about how they are made to see their gender and position in the family as a big deal. Some also referred to the socioeconomic status of their parents as a factor that affects their upbringing in terms of privilege, exposure, their human agency, and social interaction throughout their life. The three sub-themes are parent's education, gender treatment at home, and socioeconomic status. While most Nigerian parents are conscious of the cultural tenets, their education and socioeconomic status play a role in the kind of home environment they create in the children's upbringing especially in terms of gender treatment and the different parenting styles they adopt in strengthening the human agency of their children.

Although the education and socioeconomic status of the participants' parents were not directly asked, many of them talked about it as they see it as a contributing factor to the parenting style which affects their self-worth as a female child in the house and even in later life. The participants with semiliterate and literate parents mentioned how there was little to no gender disparity at home and are treated equally in terms of education/ schooling and even domestic chores. Though, some mentioned that there was an iota of gender treatment that they were unconscious of but are now reflecting on them because of the personal communication during the interview. They mentioned how they were made to accept it as a norm. How these participants understand their self-worth and human agency is a function of their home environment and the ability to resolve the different conflicts to develop hope and identity as adult females in the patriarchal Nigerian society. In this journey of strengthening human agency

and identity development, however, all the participants except Babs talked about how higher education has helped them in achieving that feat. They emphasized how their home environment and upbringings serve as a motivating factor to the acquisition of higher education that later strengthened their human agency in the male-centered society of Nigeria and beyond.

Parents' Education and Parenting Style. Here, two broad categorizations exist with different sub-categorizations. The first of the categorization covers the participants' parents' level of education. Education in this context is a formal education which is a structured one. Most of the participants regarded their parents as either literate or semi-literate parents. Since education is geared towards bringing a desirable behavior into an individual's life and to be a desirable contributing member to societal development, a semi-literate and literate parent assumes to have the capacity of adjusting cultural expectations to suit them. Yora, Babs, Eyis, Olams, Deea, and Funo mentioned how educated both or one of their parents are which is reflected in their home geographical location, parenting style, and adherence to the cultural dictates. Yora used her father's education as a determinant of where she was born and bred. She feels that his level of education made him get the opportunity to rise to the position of a renowned professor in Nigeria thereby enabling him to get a professorial accommodation on campus and in a way raising her and the siblings in a *closely knitted nuclear family* manner as against the extended polygynous family set-up that the culture proclaims.

I grew up in a fairly closely knitted nuclear family. We're a family of five, three girls, and our parents. No extended family was living with us or around us. I also grew up on campus, the University of Ibadan, so it was very quiet, you know how a campus setting would be, so I did my primary and secondary education on campus, also I went (sic) did tertiary education on the same campus. Though I was exposed to life outside campus,

most of my learning and childhood orientation and initiative were formed on campus.

(Yora, personal communication, September 25, 2020)

She revealed how this environment has enabled her parents to manage the tension of having three girls with no male child. While her culture values male children, the level of her parent's education, especially her dad made them feel unaffected and there is focus on the development of the female children they had.

Contrary to Yora's experience of being raised on campus with her nuclear family, Lata is an orphan who was raised by a communal effort in a *ghetto*. Communal effort in this context means that she was raised by many people in the community but mostly relatives. She mentioned how she was maltreated by her guardian who claimed that they were training her. Reflectively, she saw what they call training as *abuse*. Talking about how her environment influenced her upbringing, she felt motivated by experiences of living with many people as the need to stand up for herself. She learned from their experiences and she was determined to be a better person. She told her story that

I grew up without my parents and my siblings. I had to live with so many people because I lost my parents at an early age. So, I was exposed to living with people. I live with so many people. My growing up experiences was mostly that I didn't get to enjoy this parent to children relationship. So, I grew up learning from many people based on the fact that I lived with them and I got to get exposed by what happened to them and use their own mistakes or whatever they go through as a yardstick for me to learn and move on in life as shape my perspective. (Lata, personal communication, September 2, 2020)

Apart from the role of education in choosing the geographical location of the home environment, education also influenced the parenting style adopted by the parents. To Babs, her

father is educated, and his parenting style is a strict authoritarian style thereby making him be fully involved in the children's education and career path by setting high expectations with limited flexibility. She shared how her father wanted the best for her in her career path, especially as a female. One of his involvement is by visiting her during her final exam in high school to revise Mathematics with her at the last minute. She also shared how he set a target for her to meet specific goals. She was happy that he trained her to be *resilient* as a female. Another example is his role in her career path. She reported that

In my family, being a girl, my father played a role in my life to have a resilient spirit.

When I was growing up, I wanted to be a medical doctor. I tried as much as possible to gain admission into so many tertiary institutions and it was crazy. I got admission into the University of Ibadan to study Botany. I had to withdraw because my father insisted that wasn't what I wanted to do. I left that and I went to the University of Port Harcourt. I was given admission to study Anatomy. But then again, money played a role in my life.

Studying in Port Harcourt was hard; having friends who are kind of exposed and me, coming from a spiritual home, and looking at how you are going to pay your school fees was tough on me. Now getting the opportunity to go into the medical field, I think I spent two years on the program, but I had to leave the course again because money played a role. (Babs, personal communication, September 15, 2020)

The authoritarian style of Babs' father was *not helpful* as she was unable to decide what she wanted for herself when it was needed. This prevented her from attaining a higher education till the time of the interview because, by the time she was able to speak for herself, it was seemingly late, and she had to go for any available course of study. With cultural and marital challenges experienced with her mother-in-law, she is in her ninth year (what is originally a four-year

program) of her bachelor's degree after rustication for two years. Hence, her father's level of education played both a positive and negative role in her life as a Nigerian female. To Deea, her parents' education influenced her upbringing in terms of their authoritative parenting style. Her mom was a nurse while her father was a teacher and she referred to them as *semiliterate parents*. The importance they attached to education is beyond the gender line and she said they were very nurturing with appropriate communication and guidance suitable for her understanding. Therefore, she had no choice but to get higher education as her parents were involved and willing to sponsor her to the master's level regardless of her gender. So, she always danced to their tunes because they influenced her. She narrated that

In our kind of society, you are a result of what your parents made you to be. Who you are and everything is owed directly or indirectly to your parents. If they decided not to send you to school, there was nothing you could have done. With my parents, you must go to school. So, it wasn't like I had a purpose and that was why I went to school. It was just something I had to do. (Deea, personal communication, September 17, 2020)

Iwao talked about how she and her brother spent their early childhood years with their mother because their father worked in another town. Her mother's permissive parenting style made her do all the chores because her brother capitalized on his gender as a boy. She felt that the brother was influenced by his friends who do little to no house chores in their respective homes. Hence, he learned that from his friends, and since their mother allowed that, Iwao did all the chores. When she tried to exercise authority as the older sibling, she said that he will just clean two pots and hide the rest which could be very frustrating to Iwao. With that, she stated that she had to do the chores by herself:

...I don't know maybe because he felt his friends were not doing those things. So he didn't want to do it. I tried to forced [sic] him and at the end of the day, I felt like no, I don't want to deal with this headache, I prefer to do this on my own instead of having to go through a lot of troubles getting him to do it. Because most times at the end of the day I have(sic) to wash those plates again or maybe sometimes he'll be like oh, there are five pots, he is going to hide like three of them and wash just 2 so what's the essence? So, I prefer to do all those things myself. That's to say I'm a guy, don't tell me what you're supposed to do. (Iwao, personal communication, September 6, 2020)

Funo, Eyis, Math, and Dula saw their parents' education as playing a role in their upbringing as well. They shared a similar experience of how they appreciated their parenting style of communicating appropriately with them thereby enhancing their self-worth as females in the home. Despite being the only girl, Dula specifically mentioned how her father provided a suitable environment for her, which helped her to be an independent and decisive lady. She saw him blending the authoritarian and authoritative parenting style to suit the situation which made her better for it as an independent lady. To her,

Several people will say I must have been pampered so much but I get to tell people that that wasn't the case. It wasn't the case at all. My father treated me more like the boys; So many people will tell me that father of yours, you always talk about him; He never looked at me as feeble, as weak, as fragile. Anything he asked the boys to do, he'd send me to do likewise; I'm thankful for that today because when it comes to independence, I'm able to stand on my two feet and I can make decisions, I can do whatever it is I want because I can afford to do it. (Dula, personal communication, September 12, 2020).

Olams on her part mentioned how her parents were making all efforts for her to be educated not only as the female child but also as the first child of the family. She revealed how her father's family saw no need to educate the female child. Her parents' education made them reason in another direction thereby giving her the best education. Funo's parental level of education played a pivotal role in her acquisition of education as well. Tracing her historical background, she shared how her uneducated maternal grandmother educated her mother to the detriment of the males. This is because her maternal *grandmother believes female empowerment can only be achieved through education*. In her parents' case, they were both educated, and they ensured all their children were educated as well. Though, the females were more educated than the male in terms of qualifications. However, they are all doing fine in their respective fields which she attributed to their educated parents and their parenting style.

Everybody in my family went to the best schools wherever we found ourselves. My parents made it a mandate that every of the kids had to acquire education and this is based on the fact that their parents were not educated. Specifically, my maternal grandmother didn't have the opportunity to go to school, but she made it a compulsion for her daughter (my mother) to go to school. My mother instilled such value for education in us, her children. All the ladies in my family have master's degrees. And we all have Ph.D. in view, all the ladies in my family. (Funo, personal communication, September 13, 2020)

Discussion. The women interviewed voiced the crucial role of parents' education and parenting style in their upbringing. They explained how their parents influenced the way they see things and the influence in their identity in later life. Parents are the most important social influence for children when they are growing up. All participants shared their unique stories

growing up that influenced who they are now. For example, Lata's ability to resolve the conflict between abuse and training made her focus on acquiring education. She saw herself as a focused lady who does not allow the past to hunt her. Babs talked about how her disciplined and authoritarian father was involved in her choice of school and career. This affected her until when she was resolute to make decisions for herself. At that point, she carved a niche for herself, got a job and she sees herself as a fulfilled person. While she was unable to acquire education, her ability to resolve the conflict of independence made her decisive and with no higher education, she saw herself as a person with good self-esteem. To Deea, she saw the ability to resolve the independence conflict as a way of accepting whatever is pushed on her by her parents especially in terms of education. She mentioned how she had no choice but to go to school even if she had no passion for schooling/ education. However, education has helped her greatly in strengthening her human agency and she felt indebted to her parental upbringing. The role of parents as the authoritative figure in the upbringing of a child helps in socializing the child to acquire the worthwhile value of the society (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). In Nigeria's context, education is a valued societal belief and Deea's parents ensured she got it.

Reflectively, the participants talked about how cultural tasks have made or mar them and their identity development. In this context, cultural tasks include seeing the father as a head figure and all instructions come from him (Ogbu, 1981). For instance, Babs' father was very influential in her school choice. In the same manner, Lata embraced the cultural task of being trained by the community after her parents passed on. She mentioned how it takes a community to raise a child is an African slogan that she experienced. Based on this cultural task, she could not raise a voice to speak for herself when she was mistreated by her guardian all in the name of training her. In the same vein, a look at Ogbu's native theory of success serves as an important

element that influences child-rearing. For Yora, her father's education and parenting style helped in her upbringing and the location of their home environment. In the case of Funo, her maternal grandmother's definition of success and the relevance she attached to the education of the female reflected in how her parents brought her up as well. Olams and Dula also emphasized how their parents' belief influenced their upbringing and the need to be successful through the acquisition of higher education.

According to Salaam (2003), patriarchy enables the marginalization of women in terms of education, but the lived experiences of the participants do not support this claim. For example, Olams mentioned how her parents put their best into her education despite being the only female in the family. Looking at Funo's story as well, she and her female siblings are more educated even up to the doctoral level while the male siblings only have a first degree. Cultural ecology is seen as "the study of institutionalized and socially transmitted patterns of behavior interdependent with features of the environment" (Ogbu, 1981, 274). Relating this to Iwao's experience with her younger brother, she mentioned how her brother was influenced by the peers (environment) thereby affecting his social behavior of refusing to do chores because he saw himself as the male. She mentioned how he will not wash the pots well or wash some and keep the rest. The reason Iwao gave for this was his interaction with other male children in the environment.

Gender Treatment at Home. According to Makama (2013), gender is the sociocultural construct of assigning roles to males and females. Considering the biological make-up of an individual, the 19 participants in this study are all females, born and bred in Nigeria, and presently domiciled in Nigeria, Scotland, and the United States. Regarding their sociocultural background which relates to their exposure, social and cultural construct of gender, they all had

their first degree (Bachelors, National Diploma and Higher National Diploma) in Nigeria before traveling to the United States and the United Kingdom to further their studies/ means of livelihood. Some are also still in Nigeria maintaining their home and career.

During the interview, they shared their lived experiences of how the Nigerian socio-cultural construct on gender has affected them. They all shared similar stories in terms of gender treatment and patriarchy in their respective homes while growing up and how it is at present. In terms of age, the participants are members of the millennial generations and gen Z with others undisclosed because the participants were not comfortable talking about their age. The generational transition makes their experiences reflect the changes and transitions in the diverse cultural beliefs and traditions of Nigeria as it relates to the females. Looking at what Ogbu calls a cultural task in human competence in his cultural ecology theory, the participants have been socialized into the cultural beliefs of what is expected of them as a female right from childhood. They are apportioned duties and responsibilities based on their gender and birth order except for the *educated parents* who treat the children equally regardless of gender. What they seem to mostly emphasize according to some of my research participants was respect for males especially among the Igbos. Respect is one of the cultural tasks that Nigerians generally hold in high esteem. As pointed out earlier, all participants in this study are Nigerian females and their selection cut across the major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba). While the Hausa participants were not available at the time of the interview, the rich experience of the other participants due to their exposure during the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a mandatory one-year period after bachelor's degree to serve the country, gave a glimpse of the cultural beliefs of the Hausa tribes as it relates to gender.

Gender and birth order play a role in an individual's life. Chia observed how she was trained to always serve the male/ boys in her home because she is a female and the last child of the family. As an Igbo lady who was trained in the metropolitan city of Lagos, her birth order and gender kept hunting her as she was made to do most of the chores. In her words, she stated that

I was made to wash the plates. Like that was like my duty; we were also actually made to sweep the floor and then I remember(sic) that the firstborn who is a girl, was made to cook. Then, as my brothers, they hardly wash the plates; they also hardly cook except once in a while when they just want to experiment. They pound the yam because it helps them to develop muscle and it is more like a kind of masculine type of duty. (Chia, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Sharing the same ethnic group with Chia, Neko talked about how the responsibility of domestic chores was on her and other females in the house. To her, she saw it as nothing because it was an African household where there was a gender role division of household chores.

I'm the only girl in my family. I have two brothers. I will say, given the fact that it's an African household, there were those gender roles in the house. For example, I'm the first child. My younger brothers can barely cook to save their lives. They can't. When it comes to cooking, I can cook anything, but my brothers can't. That is not to say they don't do other chores around the house but things like cooking, they didn't get to do that. There were enough females for those things to go round that my brothers didn't get to do them. (Neko, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

In a similar trend, Eyis discussed how their only son was pampered and he was never allowed to do any chores because he is *okanlawon* (the child that supersedes all). She shared how biased her parents were.

My parents had just a son and four girls. There is this bias in them that I finally have a male child, the Yorubas call it ‘Okanlawon’, and that probably means ‘the only bamboo in the forest’, it wasn’t the same treatment, we get to work, he gets to sit, he gets to stay in the sitting room and watch TV while we work in the kitchen, so it’s different. (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

While it is a tradition in a Nigerian home to divide the domestic chores along the gender and birth order line, some other participants shared their experiences of how there was nothing like that. Their parents were objective in that regard. In the Owoks family, what they had was turn-taking as a way of making them responsible adults. Owoks mentioned how everyone must pound yam in her house regardless of gender or even birth order. In her house, they eat yam every other day and while yam pounding was customarily seen as a male job, her parents did not see it that way. In her words, she stated that

I remember because I’m the last child of the family, that even when I was still very young, as a baby, that my brothers and sisters took turns to do the domestic works, I mean the house chores. They took turns in cooking. (Owoks, Personal communication, September 10, 2020)

Math explained how her mother allowed them to discipline their brother if he does not want to do any chores, especially because there was a wide gap of age differences. Their mom was objective enough that she gave them authority over him, and never allowed the maid to do chores when their dad was not at home. She made all of them do the chores while the maid

relaxed. Oyins equally shared how her parents treated them equally in terms of educating them but that the male was given more freedom than the females.

We are six in numbers in my family: four girls and two guys. We were treated equally. Every one of us was educated to the degree level and anyone who desired to go further is allowed to do so. It was never a matter of because you are a girl child, you shouldn't go to school or you shouldn't do this. That has helped me in my growth and my relationship. I don't see any man as being superior to me. My background has given me a smooth-running because my parents believe in the education of both genders and we were given equal opportunities. The only short change I would say is that I wasn't allowed to go out to socialize like my brothers. (Oyins, personal communication, September 16, 2020)

Alew emphasized that there was no gender disparity in her house. What they had was a division of labor and everyone must do their chores regardless of gender or birth order.

We are all not treated differently, and everybody has their task to do at home as a child. So, it doesn't matter if you are a girl or a boy and mostly I didn't learn anything like directly sitting one down and telling the one you have to do this, you have to do that. Like most of the things I learn, I learned it from seeing my mum especially doing that because I cannot remember when I was told that this is how you should cook. Everybody has their chores to do at home as children and we all must do them regardless of if you are a boy if you are a girl, or whatever you are. (Alew, personal communication, September 12, 2020)

Discussion. In pre-historic and contemporary Nigeria, the preference for the boy child is a common phenomenon (Nnadi, 2013). Therefore, the male especially the only son (what Yorubas call Okanlawon according to Eyis during the interview) is always pampered. Even if he is the last child of the family, he wields more power than the first child of the family who is a

female (Nnadi, 2013). Looking at Eyis' experience, she and other female siblings were made to do all the chores while the *Okanlawon* stayed in the living room watching TV. In the case of Chia and Neko who are both Igbos, Chia saw herself as someone *who loves to serve people, especially the male*. This is because she was trained to always serve males while females can go to the pot and serve themselves. She also saw the need to always respect them because they have the right to inheritance as mentioned by (Nnadi, 2013). Neko also shared the experience of how she does the cooking and other domestic chores as the only female among her siblings. The only assistance she got was from other female family members that stayed with them because her brothers will not do anything since they are male.

According to Palmuleni (2014), child gender preference (CGP) affects the family-building process and interactions. This interaction could be within the home or the community. When a child is preferred to the other or allowed to interact and socialize freely in the community, it tends to enhance the social exposure of the child but if restricted, social anxiety and low self-esteem may set (Erikson, 1963). Relating to Oyin's experience whose parents did not give her the freedom she needed, she felt they preferred that her siblings who are boys to have the freedom, exposure, and interaction which affected her. She felt left out in the socializing process of the community engagement. Therefore, it can be argued that she was unable to resolve the crisis at the initiative and industry stage as pointed out by Erikson (1963). The unresolved conflict led to shame and doubt (Erikson, 1963) in her childhood. Overall, this allowed her less freedom to explore and it has an impact on her identity development. In the same manner, Chia seemed like she might develop inferiority to her male siblings and struggled to explore and form her ego-identity. This is traceable to how she was made to see herself while growing up in a

home where a male child is seen as taking on the family lineage and given preferential treatment at the detriment of the female siblings (Nnadi, 2013; Palmuleni, 2014).

Using Alew and Owoks' lived experiences, they successfully resolve the early stages of crisis and understood their roles and form an identity as females who see the male as partners and not a boss (Erikson, 1963). Owoks was exposed to turn-taking to pound yam, even though pounding yam was a male chore. She shared how she *lovingly* shares domestic roles with her husband, and she is better for it. "Your spouse is your partner in progress and not head that you should be scared of", Owoks explained. She has two girls and saw nothing wrong with that. She is not hoping to pressurize herself for not having a male child. Rather, she will train them to be the best even when "there is usually immense pressure on wives to give birth to sons" (Nnadi, 2013, p. 134). Alew explained how she was contented with having a daughter. Her ability to resolve the crisis between identity and role confusion as an adolescent has helped her to see how it was not in her capacity to determine a child's sex. Therefore, she was ready to speak for herself anytime she was discriminated against or pressurized for having a daughter and not a son.

Exposure to Opportunities and Socioeconomic Status. A family's socioeconomic status plays a role in one's exposure to opportunities. Income/ financial status is important in determining one's socioeconomic status and many of the participants referred to money as playing a role in their upbringing. Socioeconomic status (SES) is an economic and social standing that is measured by income, education, assets, and positions of affluence in the society (Wani, 2019). Based on this, SES can be said to cause inequalities, privilege, and exposure to opportunities. Math mentioned how her father's socioeconomic class affected her upbringing. She was not trained to do most chores as a female because they had a maid doing that for them. In terms of her education, there was no bias based on gender because the father has the

wherewithal to sponsor their education. However, the death of her dad when she was in her final year in high school dealt a blow to her. This led to the limited supply of resources especially financial resources and it bounced back mostly on the females since it was believed that female education ends in the kitchen.

However, Deea, Emem, Babs, Lata, and Dula shared how the family's socioeconomic status affected them in terms of privilege, exposure, and gender treatment. Deea revealed how there was no gender disparity while growing up and she attributed this to her parent's financial status.

Retrospectively, if I want to think about growing up, we were not raised differently because we didn't have apartments of our own. I remember we had financial issues and we moved to an apartment that was a boys' quarter, and that boys' quarter had only two rooms. My parents were living in one room and my siblings and I were staying in the second room. So, my brother and I and every other person slept together in the same room. When it comes to raising kids, we didn't have much property. We did everything together. I know that I was solely responsible for washing plates while my brother swept the house. So, there was no such disparity. I think the major thing that I can point to is that we are more attached to my mother than to my father. We were not friends with dad. So, that kind of male influence was not there except that he just exercised power as a father. Maybe those are the kinds of things that did not make the gender disparity so obvious while I was growing up. (Deea, personal communication, September 17, 2020).

In sharing her story, Emem explained how she had to do a part-time study to send herself to school. She lost her mom at a tender age and her National Diploma (ND) was sponsored by her sisters who could not afford to sponsor her for the Higher National Diploma (HND). Finding

herself in low socioeconomic status and a product of polygynous marriage, she had no privilege of university education. She struggled to get the ND. While her wish was to be a Chartered Accountant, the inability to finance it prevented her from achieving that professional goal. Hence, she felt that her exposure was limited, and she cannot also rise to the peak of her career as an accountant due to the socioeconomic status. In her story, she narrated that

I am from a polygamous (sic) family. We were (sic) four, all females. I lost my mom at the tender age of ten, over 35 years now. I was trained and brought up by my sisters, my siblings. They stood by me. I did my ND full time while I did the HND as a Part-timer just because of financial constraints. While I was doing the HND, I was partially working so I was going to school for part-time and weekend study. I'm not yet qualified as a chartered accountant but where I work now is the accounting department, which is like an accounting environment. (Emem, personal communication, September 10, 2020)

After several years of staying at home to get into the university to pursue a career in Biochemistry, Babs talked about how she was financially limited because the fee was too high for her parents to afford. Her wealthy uncle who encouraged her to apply to the school and promised to sponsor her was no longer ready to sponsor her education when she got admission. As a child who was trained by a strict father and a religious mom, it was challenging for her to join the elitist friends she had. These friends promised to help with her fees but because of her understanding of how they got their money, she was reluctant to accept their offer because she may need to join their *aristo* way of life which was against her religious and strict upbringing. The financial constraint prevented her from continuing her education at the university. To Neko, her exposure to education in the US has changed her line of thought positively and she hopes that

this would change her socioeconomic status for the better as well because of her *driving force*.

She said that

I left my country; I left the job I had to come here to study and get something better. So, whatever it takes for me to achieve that purpose, that is what I'm going to do. If it takes a Ph.D., if it takes a postdoc for me to get there, that is what I'm going to do. So, that is my driving force. I'm heading somewhere and every other thing is by the way.

In Sum, these participants talked extensively about the role of their socioeconomic status as paramount to their exposure and privilege they get to enjoy as females.

Discussion. Considering the native theory of success by Ogbu (1981), the social class of Deea's parents influenced the kind of apartment they lived in and who/what she saw as her role model. Her interpretation of success stemmed from what she saw at home. To her, it does not seem to be a bother sharing one room with other siblings with no privacy. In contrary to Yora's case, her father was her role model, and she strives to make him happy all the time. Seeing her father as her role model drives her zeal to be fulfilled and acquire properties. Even though women are excluded from ownership of the landed property because it is culturally the exclusive preserve of men (Nwogu, 2015).

According to McFadden (1997), poverty is used as a mechanism to silence women in a patriarchal society. To Emem, she never allowed this to be her portion. While she was financially constrained, she engaged in businesses to acquire education, get exposed, and give a voice to herself. She mentioned how her education has helped her to get a government job and change her family history for good. Based on this as well, she talked about how her new socioeconomic status has exposed her to the proper training of her children equally regardless of gender.

Synthesis. The participants discussed extensively the role of their family environment in shaping their lives. While alluding to this, their parent's education level, socioeconomic status, and exposure set the tone for the kind of home environment and parenting styles adopted. This is also related to how they treat each gender in terms of domestic chores and the career involvement of the children. While the geographical location is at play in an individual's upbringing and exposure, the will of the individual to be positive regardless of the environment helped in shaping the identity of the individual. This is a function of determination and having a positive outlook on life (a case of Lata and Mijo who grew up in a ghetto) and still try their best to acquire higher education.

In terms of gender treatment at home, the various interviews revealed that most parents were no longer seeing a difference in the gender of their children. What they mostly emphasize is discipline, respect, and the need for the children to be useful members of society. Socioeconomic status, especially finance is important in educating a child in Nigeria. Due to the societal tag on education as a status symbol, all the participants explained how their parents ensure they are educated. Where there were limited financial resources, the child engages in other sources of income or becomes an entrepreneur to get money for her education. Family interference also played a role in the development of the child and this validated Ogbu's notion of cultural ecology as most extended family members always try to enforce the cultural norms and values on the family members.

Theme Two: Nigerian Education and Its Impact on Female Empowerment

A look at the participants' lived experiences showed the importance that Nigerian society attached to education, specifically university education. University education as a status symbol marker is mostly funded by the Nigerian government while the students are to pay student fees.

These students' fees are still a lot for the lower-class people who are mostly Nigerians. Therefore, there is usually a struggle to afford the student fees. With this struggle and the importance attached to education, most families would prefer to sponsor the male who they think will retain the family name (because of patriarchy) and ask the female to learn a trade or start a business. However, this trend of educating the male at the expense of the female is not a common lived experience of the participants in my study. Of all the 19 participants, only one person does not have a bachelor's degree while only two went to polytechnic. The other 16 participants are university graduates with most of them on their second degree (master's degree).

Based on the pursuit of education and how it relates to the research question of what challenges Nigerian females encounter in the Nigerian education system, this theme on Nigerian education and gender norms has three subthemes. The first subtheme outlines the participants' motivations for attaining higher education, the second subtheme outlines the participants' educational qualifications impact on their lives. The third and last subtheme reveals the educational challenges they face in the Nigerian education system as females.

Motivations for Attaining Education. Motivation is what spurs one to action. It is sometimes based on one's need (check Bang's work on motivation). Based on the participants' lived experiences, three major reasons motivate them in attaining education in a society where the education of the girl/ woman is not seen as a necessity. These three reasons are further divided into subthemes of economic stability and sustainability, goal actualization, and career progression.

Economic Stability and Sustainability for the Future. To be stable economically, an individual should be able to have access to the necessities of life like clothing, quality shelter, and food. These necessities help in reducing poverty and one way of being stable economically is

by having a job that provides a stable income. The income can be used to meet all the financial needs. If the income is consistent, there would be economic sustainability. Although the Nigerian system sees men as the ones to shoulder all the financial responsibilities of the home, the participants talked about how these responsibilities are overwhelming on men. Some also talked about how this provision by men is used as the main tool of women's oppression. Therefore, they acquired education for their financial freedom and not to be a liability to any man. Emem wished to work in a bank because of the belief that bankers are wealthy and are financially stable. Even when she was not able to work in a bank, she said she was still financially stable as she is working as an accountant. She believed that what a man can do, a woman can do it better in all aspects. When Onons was talking about her motivation, she mentioned her female professors who were confident and doing fine. This made her keep pushing so that, she could be financially stable and have confidence in herself like her professors. In her interview, she said that

I didn't think a female can get to the level my female professors are. I didn't believe it but when I saw them and how confident they were, their courage, financial status and they were doing well. It serves as one of my drives from the first year. I see the female lecturers and I am what? If these women could do this, why can't I? (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Self-Actualization. Some of the participants shared how their life goal is the propelling force to acquire education. For Oyins, her purpose of attaining higher education is to make a positive impact and be better than her parents who are not educated. She stated that

My motivation for higher education to make an impact, somebody that, in the future, I can have people that will look up to me, like being a reference point of success to others. And looking at my mother, she is a very intelligent woman. My dad too is

intelligent but they couldn't push through their education and I found out that in one way or the other, that affected them. (Oyins, personal communication, September 16, 2020).

Like Oyins' purpose of attaining education, Alew's goal was to make an impact as an educator and to be better than her uneducated parents. She felt that her parents would have been more financially stable, respected, and make impacts if they were educated. Hence, making impacts and be better than her parents was a goal she needed to actualize through education. According to Iwao, her purpose of attaining education was to actualize the goal her uneducated mom set for her. Her mom wanted her to be educated like her father who was a chartered accountant and a master's holder. She said that

My major motivation is my mum...she didn't get a higher education, but my dad got a higher education...growing up, my mum always instilled in me "your father wants you to go to school". Because my mum was a tailor when I'm trying to sew cloth, she will say "this girl go to school, so when you're done with school, you can come back to learn these things". She got me through my primary school and high school. By the time I got to the university, I found the drive myself. (Iwao, personal communication, September 6, 2020).

Funo's purpose in attaining higher education was to actualize the goal of building a school because of her passion for teaching from childhood. Therefore, she is putting in all efforts to achieve this goal. She plans to do a degree in education after her doctoral program and after that, she would build a school of international standards in her hometown in Nigeria.

Career Progression. Chronologically, the education system is like a foundation that a new level is built on the previously accomplished level. For example, one cannot do a master's

degree without completing a bachelor's degree. Hence, most participants talked about acquiring education for career progression. They did this by furthering their education or doing some professional courses to be promoted in their place of work. Shia's explained that her purpose of attaining education was double-layered. The first was to be financially stable and the second one was to progress in her educational pursuit which will enhance her career progression. She explained that

...for me basically, apart from the chance of being able to give myself a better life than my parents for my kids and future, aside from that there is a fulfillment that comes in when you desire to be something and then you are that thing. For example, when you desire to be a professor or a doctorate holder or a having a top position or rank in your choice of career and you do, I think you tend to feel fulfilled. It's also part of the passion and the desire to live a better life and the fact that it improves my chance at having a better life. (Shia, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Neko also shared the same story with Shia about education helping her to be financially stable and to progress in her academic pursuits. She explained how she is determined to get her doctorate after her master's. As at the time of the interview, she was an adjunct professor but she hopes to rise to the position of a full professor in the nearest future. She said that the attainment of the full professorship is by continuing her education. Eyis wanted more not only financially but in making impacts and in advancing herself holistically because of the Nigeria situation of getting a job. Therefore, she keeps progressing in her education. To her,

The first thing that drove me into it is the fact that I just wanted more, I know there is more, and I don't believe that everything is about money, and making money, and working for people...I want my children to look up my name after I'm gone and say this

what my mom did when she was alive...I want to make an impact, I could make an impact in other areas, it doesn't have to be in academics, but then I just want to be, I want more of that aspect because I believe that knowledge empowers us. (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Lata's environment influenced her a lot to pursue her education degree. Therefore, she is attaining higher education for career progression and to be a better person in life.

...I think one other thing was like I said earlier on that I have people in my environment that I looked up to... the way they like engaging in conversation, the way they talk... when you see them among people the way they contribute. You wanna aspire to be like them that oh! These people are doing amazingly well and they would not tell you anything outside of their experiences in school. (Lata, personal communication, September 2, 2020)

Apart from goal actualization, economic sustainability, and career progression, Mijo mentioned the need to change her home environment and get exposure as her purpose of attaining education. Dula, Math, Yora, and Deea explained that their purpose was to satisfy their parents because they keep sponsoring and encouraging them to get an education.

Discussion. In my study, the participants expressed motivation of attaining education as both general and specific because their career choice is determined by their educational attainment goal. According to Bandura (2010), self-efficacy is people's beliefs, perceptions, and abilities to embark on personal activities that influence their life affairs. For example, Lata's belief and perception about moving away from her ghetto environment to be a better person made her focus on her education, specifically to attain university education. This is because she believed that her educational attainment would change her life for the better. At the end of the

interview, she mentioned that her positive belief about education influenced her life and gave her a voice in society. Eyis belief was to make an impact especially for her children and the incoming generation. Therefore, she focused on her education so that she could achieve her goal of making an impact.

In the same vein, Shia, Neko, Mijo, Emem, and Eyis' need for competence and autonomy is also important to them and that propels them to focus on their education (Bandura, 2010). According to them, they shared three cogent reasons that motivate them to attain higher education. These motivations seem different, but the explanations given by the participants seem related as they attain education for financial sustainability, goal actualization, and career progression.

Oyins, Alews, Owoks, Iwao, and Funo explained how their motivation for attaining higher education was for goal actualization. In achieving their goals, these women were careful of their chosen course of study, they were focused and directed all their efforts to the attainment of the goals. For example, Alew loved impacting knowledge even as a child. Therefore, she saw her cognitive process of self-efficacy as knowledge production and teaching thereby making her channel her effort to the teaching profession (Peterson & Wood, 2008). Although, it took her a while to understand her self-concept because she was keen on studying another major at the university. After series of attempts, she understood herself and channeled her effort to her goal orientation of knowledge production and impacting knowledge. As a teacher and child psychologist, Alew felt fulfilled as she thought that she has was able to achieve her goal despite the societal restrictions on females. Funo's goal on the other hand was to have a school of her own. She is actualizing that goal as she hopes to do an education degree after her doctoral

degree. This she said was to enhance her better understanding of the teaching profession, even though she has been teaching for years.

For Iwao and Oyins, their goal was to make an impact in society and to surpass their parents' achievements. Therefore, they wanted to develop competencies so that they can achieve more than their parents did. Oyins mentioned that her parents were not educated and as such, she was trying her best to get an education. She also mentioned how she loved to make an impact on people. She felt she was actualizing this goal through her social media page because she saw herself as a freelance motivation speaker. To her, the various speeches she gives on social media are very impactful. Emem and Onons motivation for attaining higher education were for economic stability and sustainability. They both saw this motivation as a way of autonomous development through their competence. They thought that this competence can be achieved through the acquisition of education.

Onons, shared how the female professors in the department served as her motivators. She appreciated how the professors were respected, their physical appearance, and how financially stable they were. As such, Onons made it a point of duty not to limit herself to her first degree but to proceed to get a master's degree. She explained that the education and exposure to female professors became a role model for her, and she understood the value of education in the labor market. This will make her know her value and bargain well for salaries which will sustain her financially. To her, education does not only give someone a voice, but it also helps to eradicate poverty which is a motivation for her educational attainment. In a bid to be financially independent, she was keenly interested in developing her competence and self-efficacy through education.

Shia, Neko, Eyis, and Lata mentioned how important it was for them to secure a better future for themselves. Therefore, their purpose in attaining higher education was to progress in their career. For example, Shia was a master's student at the time of the interview. She shared how she hoped to get a doctoral degree so that she would be a force to reckon with as a Microbiologist. Neko just finished her master's degree, and she teaches at an American university at the time of the interview. As a young lady, she was driven by the need to better her lot which she mentioned that can only be achieved by advancing in her career. Through education, she understood she would develop self-efficacy and competence to do what she wants to do. Hence, she hopes to start her doctoral degree in the following academic year.

Lata was an orphan who saw the need for education as enhancing her career. She also saw education as a way of making her financially stable. While she wanted to develop competence, her goal of leaving the *ghetto* environment was also a driving force for her to progress in her career. She was also presently on her master's program in the United States. She hoped to do a second master's degree because she felt she is not getting a sense of self in her present master's degree.

Educational Qualifications and Impact on Female Empowerment. Nigerian higher education is made up of Colleges of Education, Polytechnics (National Diploma and Higher National Diploma), and Universities. In Nigeria, Colleges of education is a teacher training college where prospective K-12(US terminology) teachers are rigorously trained. It is a practically oriented institution and an equal of it is the US college. There is a disparity between Polytechnic and Universities in Nigeria. Polytechnics are more practical focused while the university is more research-based. However, the polytechnic graduates are discriminated against and are not allowed to get to the peak of their careers. In this study, all the participants completed

their secondary school and passed their West African Examination Council Exam (WAEC).

Babs is yet to complete her first degree due to many circumstances that seem to be beyond her most of which she alluded to sociocultural factors as a Nigerian female. While she could not comment on the impact of higher education, she mentioned how being resilient has helped her. Although Nigerians emphasize the importance of education, she mentioned how different certificates in the United States has helped her. She saw the impact of the certificates in her life as she was independent and able to make millions of naira without the degree. To her, education is not necessarily a status booster. She said that

The millions I have made in my life wasn't based on the fact that I am educated. My career hasn't given me any money. I made millions of naira without me having any degree. I worked in a hotel as a personal assistant. I handled the position so well for a couple of years and later I was promoted to a procurement manager. From being a procurement manager, I became a manager. After being the hotel manager, I became an in-house auditor. (Babs, personal communication, September 15, 2020)

She mentioned that the impact of education is not to be relevant. One needs to be focused, hardworking and value-oriented to stay relevant. To her,

...I feel the value you have placed on yourself kind of have a way it tells on you. I don't see my career playing any role; I see the values that I have playing the role in things that I do. This is me. I have a position that I'm holding at hand. I want to do it perfectly because that is me. It doesn't tell whether any assistant with me. Because I'm there, it has to be perfect... I go extra mile to push myself to do certain things that I feel that even a degree holder would start to wonder (Babs, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

Emem could not attend university because of financial constraints. However, she shared the positive impact of her degree (ND and HND) as helping her to be where she is today in terms of finance and exposure to opportunities. She said education is good and it gave her a *voice*.

...I always said I liked working in a bank. Unfortunately, I did not end up working in a bank, but I am still able to achieve what I want to be. And with God, everything is just fine. Just like my place of work now, with the level I am now if it is not because of the education... fine there are still some discriminations between HND and BSc, but even with that, if not because of the education, I won't be where I am now (Emem, personal communication, September 10, 2020).

Just like the way Emem mentioned the impact of education as giving her a voice, Olams talked about that as well especially as the only female and the first child of the family. She explained how education has helped her to be calm, think critically, and be socially recognized. She said

Well, education has taught me to be calm... I used to think people that are not calm are illiterate...I think education has helped me to be contented. To think deep before acting...before talking because I know whatever I say is very important. I think education has also helped me socially to be recognized...I think being educated has given me the edge over others (Olams, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Mijo has a bachelor's degree in English Education. She explained how education has made her outspoken and came out of her shell and be a better version of herself. Education has also impacted her in her choice of the neighborhood she stayed in as she was able to leave the *ghetto* where she grew up because of education. She stated thus

I would say my higher education has helped me to move out of the former environment...from what I got from school too, it helped me to be more outspoken... it has affected my professional life that now that I get to work, I am not shy. I am not scared of airing my point of view. I just know that... worst to worst, you would accept, or you would not accept it. I am confident more because of my education. (Mijo, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Shia, a young lady in her 20s had her bachelor's degree in Nigeria and on her master's degree in the United States at the time of the interview. Sharing her lived experiences about the impact of education, she explained that

My education has helped me a lot to achieve my career... my bachelor's degree in Nigeria helped me to secure a master's degree obviously, and then this master's degree is going to help me to apply for jobs at senior level positions in my line of career. One can get a job with the B.Sc. but it's going to be at an entry-level or being an assistant. But getting a master's degree would help me in my career because if I want to apply for a job I won't apply at entry level but at senior level, which I could not get with my initial bachelor's degree. Therefore, my pursuit of higher education is pushing me forward to my professional career goals. (Shia, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

According to Lata, a Fulbright scholar who was presently on her master's degree in the United States at the time of the interview, education has enhanced her self-confidence and the opportunity to participate in the Fulbright program which turned her life around. Iwao felt that education has helped her a lot as she was a different person, knew her onion professionally to the extent that she identified as a molecular biologist. Onons felt that education has helped her to be

financially stable especially with the Nigeria situation where importance is attached to one's education degree. According to her,

...if I don't have certain qualifications, I don't know where I would have been or what I would have been doing. Nigeria has placed us in such a place that if you don't have a degree, you might not be able to survive financially. But at least if you have your educational qualifications, it goes a long way. It's earlier for you to apply for this job or that job or doing big, so yes. (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Math, a proprietress shared how education has helped her in making impacts in students' lives. She was also able to apply what she learned in school to solve practical problems. Dula, a master's degree holder, and a teacher in an international school in Nigeria felt fulfilled because of her education degree. Education has placed her in an advantaged position professionally and she saw the world differently because of her education. She shared this by saying

Discussion. The impacts of education on the lives of my study participants cannot be overemphasized. Education is a crucial tool in developing a united, strong, and self-nation (NPE, 2004). An individual as a microcosm of the larger society is trained to be self-reliant and later develop the macrocosm larger society. Part of self-reliance is the ability to cater to one's needs and speak for oneself when the needs arise. Some of the participants in this study shared how their educational qualifications have made them vocal and self-reliant. For example, Emem and Onons specifically talked about how education has helped them to get a job and be financially sustained. This they thought made them self-reliant. Although Emem was not a chartered accountant, she mentioned how working in the accounting department and with the federal government of Nigeria made her self-reliant due to job security.

According to Agba, Ushie, Agba and Nkpoyen (2010), job security is the guaranteed expectation that employees can keep their job without fear of losing it. This further helped in providing stable job opportunities for qualified Nigerians and Emem is one of those qualified Nigerians. In consonance with Udoye and Udum's (2013) assertion that education must equip its beneficiaries with self-reliance tenets, both Emem and Onons experiences validate this. This is because they saw their education as helping them to be financially independent and self-reliant.

Education helps in developing a worthwhile value in an individual and to bring about a desirable change (Adaralegbe, 1971). Olams, Mijo, Lata, and Iwao shared how their educational qualification has brought about positive changes in their behaviors. For example, Olams said that education has given her a voice especially among her father's relatives whose female children are not educated. She also said that her education has made her be a calm and critical thinker. Mijo and Lata shared how they can leave their ghetto environment, be outspoken and see a brighter future due to their education. This supports the notion that education brings about social mobility (Sadovnik, Cookson & Semel, 2014). Aside from leaving the environment, Lata also shared that her education, especially her master's degree has made her have more confidence in herself. Iwao saw a desirable change in her due to her education as she can make a difference in the family. Like Iwao, Oyins was happy as she can make an impact because of her educational qualification and exposure. Dula felt fulfilled and she attributed this to her educational qualification.

Educational Challenges. Nigerian females encounter myriads of challenges right from home where there is gender role and son preference. Stemming from this, some females are prevented from attaining higher education due to many factors. Looking at the stories shared by the Nigerian female participants in this study, the educational challenges can be broadly

categorized into sociocultural, financial, gender stereotype and bias, sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence and patriarchy, enrolment procedures, learning, and instructional facilities inadequacies. As much as they loved to share the various educational challenges they faced, some of them were reluctant to talk about the challenges which I think is because of my relationship with them. Therefore, they do not feel safe for me to be privy to their private life hurdles and how they have been able to overcome the challenges. However, some of them shared what they are comfortable sharing about their educational challenges as Nigerian females.

Eyis, Shia, and Neko explained the gender bias and societal pressure on ladies to get married as soon as possible, probably in their 20s. Society saw their academic pursuit as chasing men away from them and an unmarried female is seen as an unsuccessful person. Despite this pressure, they remain focused. According to Eyis, her educational challenge was linked to gender stereotypes and bias. This she explained that the sociocultural patriarchal society of Nigeria sees men as the successful ones. Therefore, a successful woman is assumed to be intimidating to men. In her experience, her supervisor was reluctant to take her in for her Ph. D because she was still single (marriage is seen as a success in Nigeria for the females especially among the Yorubas) and he was encouraging the male student to start his Ph.D. in earnest. She narrated that

The only experience I had once, it wasn't from my parent, it was when I was going to pick up the Ph.D. He said that men would get intimidated if I have a Ph.D., you don't want to be intimidation to any man, and I said I want to get married, it's one of the things I want in life, but it's not going to stop me from getting a Ph.D. Meanwhile, he was pressurizing the other boy to submit his proposal so that he could start his Ph.D. (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Just like Eyis, Shia said that people were worried when a female starts a master's degree because of the bias that, she would not see a man to marry her. She saw this as a societal pressure on the females in the patriarchal society. She did not mention this as her experience but said that is one of the challenges Nigerian females encounter generally. Neko talked about the societal pressure of expecting her to get married at 25 with no one thinking of how successful she was in her career.

...Even though I don't get so much pressure from my own immediate family, I still feel the pressure from society...they keep saying that "I'm in my mid-twenties. I'm getting older. I should be thinking of settling down". But the guy of my age is not thinking about all that. If he wants to go all the way to Ph.D. to postdoc, he will just go ahead and do it because in the African society, in the Nigerian society, whenever a guy is ready, he can come back and find a wife. But as a girl, you feel like you only have a certain time frame. So, that discourages a lot. (Neko, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Yora shared her father's story of how the patriarchal society emphasized the education of males at the detriment of the female, especially when there was a financial constraint. She explained that

...when the dilemma of which child should go to school arise, because of the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society the male child is mostly likely to be given the chance to further his education while the female child would be told to go learn a vocation, a good example is in my father's family, the male children were the only ones that went to school (Yora, personal communication, September 25, 2020)

Oyins experiences range from sociocultural to patriarchy and financial constraints. She revealed how she had to stop her career because she could not sponsor herself after she got married. She

also shared how her husband was not in support of her going back to school. Therefore, she only focused on motherhood and wifehood but abandoned her career and education. According to Owoks, Nigerian females face a lot of sexual harassment from male professors with no one to challenge them. This tends to water down the academic success of these females in the Nigerian higher education system. She gave an instance that

The challenges that I know females face in attaining their higher education come during your course of study in the institution. Females face a lot of challenges from the lecturers because of the sexual harassment that they often get from the lecturers compared to the boys. Boys don't have a problem if they can reach the task. But females, even if you know what you're doing, if you're unfortunate that a lecturer is asking you out, you cannot escape it. (Owoks, personal communication, September 10, 2020)

Apart from financial constraint, patriarchy, bias, sexual harassment, and gender stereotypes, sociocultural challenges, career choice, and enrolment are the challenges that the participants shared as educational challenges as well. Deea, Funo, Emem, Alew, and Mijo mentioned how they had to change their career choice because their initial course of study was tagged male courses. This is common in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field. Babs recounted her experience by saying the Nigerian education system is bedeviled with many issues that affect not just the females but everyone in society.

Discussion. There is a myriad of challenges that Nigerian women encounter. One of them is related to education. While the Nigerian education system has many challenges on its own, the encumbrances that the sociocultural beliefs placed on the female made their challenges more (Ogbuagu, 2009). As such, the participants in my study explained the different facets of educational challenges they encountered. These challenges include social pressure, financial

constraint, and harassment. Despite these constraints, the participants stated that they never allowed it to prevent them from achieving their goals.

To support the assertion that religion and tradition are used to oppress Nigerian women (Abubakar,2017). Eyis, Shia, and Neko explained how there is a lot of pressure to get married instead of furthering their education. For Eyis, she shared how her supervisor was emphasizing marriage instead of accepting to supervise her for Ph.D. However, she said the professor was supporting the male students to start his Ph.D. and that he was not reluctant to supervise him. Neko and Shia shared how there is tension to be married in the 20s with no pressure to further their education.

Although transactional sex is a pervasive sexual culture in Nigeria because of the society's stereotyped gender expectations where the man provides and the woman is subordinated and compensated (Mensah,2019), Owoks and Alew talked about how females are harassed by university professors. They see it as a transaction because the professors usually threaten the female students that refuse their advances. Therefore, there is the slogan of *use what you have to get what you want*. While this is a common challenge that females encounter in the Nigerian education system (Kullima, Kawuwa, Audu, Mairiga, & Bukar, 2010), the participants were careful to openly relay their lived experiences in this regard.

Also, there are infrastructural deficits in Nigerian schools (Adepoju & Fabiyi,2007). This was supported by the experiences of all participants in this study. Most of them shared how there were inadequate classrooms, study materials, motivated and empathetic professors to encourage females in their academic pursuit. Specifically, Babs explained how she was yet to complete her bachelor's degree because of the educational challenges that corroborated the cultural challenges of matrimony. Oyins on her part explained that her challenge was financial. She shared how she

could not further her education since she got married. Because she was not financially buoyant, her husband, who is the breadwinner is not willing to support her education. Rather, she needed to focus on the family which, like contextualized historically, was the prerogative responsibility of women (Booth, 2002).

Synthesis. The Nigerian education system has its pros and cons. One benefit is that it serves one of the purposes of education – empowerment (Sadovnik et al., 2014). Despite the suppression of the women in my study, they all expressed how education has empowered them by giving them a voice, enabling them to be financially sustaining and stable, enabled them to make an impact and feel fulfilled. Because of the voice-silence of females in Nigeria, the participants’ motivation for acquiring education was categorized into economic stability, goal actualization, and career progression. They all shared how this motivation was geared towards their identity building and to correct the notion that women are weak. To stop the belief that poverty is a mechanism to silence women (McFadden, 1997), the women in this study saw education as a way of boosting their financial strength and having a voice.

Apart from the sociocultural challenges, the participants shared the educational challenges which are somewhat related to societal beliefs. Some peculiar ones include the discouragement from progressing in their education, limiting them to a particular course of study, financial constraint, and the need to get married at a certain age. Despite the gender norms, all participants except Babs attributed their success stories to their educational attainment.

Theme Three: Overcoming Educational Challenges for Career Inspiration

The male-centered Nigerian society poses a lot of encumbrances on the females. Some of these challenges have been highlighted in the educational challenges. However, some challenges transcend the educational challenges. These range from marital issues, career choice,

and religion-imposed encumbrances. Despite all the challenges, some of the participants shared how they overcame these constraints to be successful as Nigerian females.

Specifically, this theme is designed to provide answers to the research question of what stories do female Nigerians share about any special steps they have taken to empower themselves? Before the talk about empowerment, there must have been certain hurdles that one might have overcome. Therefore, this theme has three sub-themes. The first relates to the sociocultural challenges in their career aspiration, the second sub-theme deals with how they overcame these challenges, and the third sub-theme covers their career inspiration and fulfillment.

Sociocultural Challenges in Career Inspiration. The construction of the Nigerian society is in a way that most women forfeit their careers to fulfill the societal dictates of a successful woman whose responsibility is child-rearing and cooking. Because of my participants' upbringing, most of them especially the unmarried ones felt they do not have critical sociocultural challenges in their career aspirations. However, the married ones talked about the challenges of managing the home and their career (schooling, business, or corporate jobs). Math, Emem, Eyis, Mijo, Onons, Oyins shared how challenging it was to be a wife, mother, and career person. According to Math, she had to delay her master's degree when she was having kids and that is why she was still studying as at the time of the interview She explained that

...It has been quite challenging, but I think that lecturers also know that it's very challenging for a female to be doing her post-graduate and also be raising children. I am mostly out on weekends as that is when my lectures fall to...I'd have passed this stage academically, but the children were very young to be left alone. I had to take a career gap because of the children (Math, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Apart from Math's challenge of managing a home and her master's program, she also shared how she was not promoted to the post of Vice-principal because of her gender. Rather, a person she interviewed was made the principal because he is a man. Like Math, Emem mentioned how challenging it was for her to pursue her career especially because she stayed far away from the office and the road network was bad thereby making her be stressed. She also talked about the financial challenge which prevented her from staying closer to her office and performing at her optimum because she has divided attention of taking care of the home and focusing on her career. She complained that

Yes, it's affecting. The stress at times is much, most especially on financial aspects. Like someone now that is working in a distance of more than 2 hours on the road before getting to the office or before getting to your home or before getting to your place of work. In fact at times even in the morning before you leave early to go to work, maybe your children are still sleeping, they will not even set their eyes to see you that morning before you go to the office. Yet, you are still not doing your best at work (Emem, personal communication, September 10, 2020).

Eyis is unmarried and she narrated how there was pressure on her to get married to the detriment of continuing her academic career. According to Mijo, she wanted to be an accountant or be a customs officer like her mom. However, the sociocultural belief that a girl child should not be allowed to decide affected her. She explained how her mom picked up the university application form and filled out English Education for her because her mom saw that as a feminine course. Mijo shared that she was not always proud of the course and that made her have low self-esteem. This is because people that study education are not always respected. She narrated that

Before I got into the university, my mum was the one that filled the form and processed everything. She was the one that picked the course. She doesn't pray for any of her female children to work with custom. That she knows what she face with traveling to different states, getting transfer to different places. Then, when she picked English Education for me. She said with English Education, I would have time for family...Like she already have everything planned out herself without asking me. It get us having an issue because my brother didn't get the same course imposition from her. (Mijo, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Onons narrated how her siblings were complaining because she was pursuing her education and not married at 35years. According to her, education was not what the Igbos emphasized and as such, it was a battle for her as an Igbo lady to be single at 35 but keep bargaining educational certificates and not marriage certificates.

...I was 35 when I got married so for me my siblings were getting worried like you are not getting married what is the problem? I am like there is no problem. I finished undergraduate and went in for my master's and my siblings were like ah! This book you are reading go and bring husband this book is not as important as getting married... In Igbo culture where I am from, a married woman that has boys like four boys and she is not even educated will be more respected than a woman that has attained a doctorate but she is not married and has no children (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Oyins was not living the future she saw for herself when she was young. She shared how she was not able to pursue her career because of the need to take care of the home and the

children. She also explained that she was not financially buoyant, and her husband was not in support of her ambition let alone helping her financially. She narrated that

I am not financially buoyant and my husband is the major financier of the home with 2 children. This has hindered me whenever I bring up the subject of my furthering my academic pursuit...he says he doesn't feel my pursuit of a Master's is possible. That is for finance. Culturally too, the husband has the final say. You find out that now you don't have to make decisions on your own. You have to consider your children. I must tell you there are so many things I like to do but I have to consider my children. That has been my challenge. The culture always wants to make us second-class citizens. There are a lot of biases against us...It was as if I don't have any ability again...This is not the future I foresaw for myself. So, culture hasn't been kind to me(Oyins, personal communication, September 16, 2020).

Discussion. The setup of Nigerian society has confronted women with many challenges. The participants in this study talked about many challenges they faced and how they overcame them, specifically with the sociocultural challenges they faced in their career inspiration. Because patriarchy in Nigeria marginalizes women from acquiring education (Makama, 2013), Math, Emem, Eyis, and Onons talked about how challenging it was for them to wear the hat of a Nigerian woman and a career person. Math shared how challenging it was to focus on her graduate study and take care of her children. Math's decision to take a gap year and focus on taking care of the children and the home supports the claim that femaleness is characterized by weakness, gentleness, and the kitchen is seen as the permanent place regardless of the education level attained (Asiyanbola, 2005; Makama, 2013; Dogo, 2014). Oyins' lived experience of not

continuing her education and lived the future she saw for herself also supports the claim that the kitchen is the last resort for females especially Nigerian females.

On contrary, the actions of Eyis and Onons to continue their education even when they were in their 30s negates the claim that all females will end up in the kitchen after been educated (Makama, 2013). Of course, they will be responsible women that oversee the wellbeing of the domestic activities in the home, that does not mean that their professional life and career must end abruptly because of the societal expectations of them as females. Because patriarchy is not only oppressive, but also discriminatory against women socially, economically, politically, and culturally (Ferriera, 2004), participants like Mijo were not allowed to choose their career path by themselves. Mijo's mom chose a major for her to adhere to a career path that is specifically designed for females. She shared how females are expected to be teachers so that they can take care of the home.

To also avoid rebuke, dishonor, and disgrace of divorce, Nigerian women are made to sacrifice a lot to keep the sanctity of marriage (Abubakar, 2017). This could be seen from the attitude of Oyins (who forfeited her career of making an impact), Math (who took a gap year), and Emem (who agreed to stay far away from the office as a way of obeying her husband and taking care of the home).

The thought that women's space is the home with the responsibility of domestic chores, childbearing, and satisfying the sexual urge of the husband (Azodo & Eke 2007; Dogo, 2014) cannot be refuted. This is because Emem talked about her challenge in this regard. While she hoped to focus on her career, she was challenged by the responsibilities of being a woman especially with the fact that her house was far from her office. Therefore, she was left to focus on what is more important to her

In sum, the many hats of wifehood, motherhood, and career personhood that Nigerian females must juggle within the male-centered society have bestowed on them many challenges. Scaling through and/or managing these challenges effectively was the story they shared about how they overcame those challenges to be a better person.

Overcoming Challenges. Despite all the hindrances encountered in their career, most of the participants talked about how they overcame the challenges by being focused. Some just ignored and never allowed the sociocultural challenges to define them. For Onons, she remained focused and never saw failure as an option for her despite the discrimination of not getting married at her age. To her,

I will say for a fact I never give up and I don't if I put my mind to something, nothing you can say will deter me. I will do it. Yes, because of the points that failure was not an option, at that point in my life. Yes, F was not even on my list. The few D I had I wasn't happy about. (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

When Math was asked how she overcame the career of placing a junior staff above her, she explained that she was not affected. All she did was to keep developing herself and doing her best. Because of the personal development and the results her students were getting, she was eventually made the head of the Maths and Science department. Iwao stated how she gave immediate responses to what may seem to be a hindrance to her.

I don't think there are any of those cultural expectations that have hindered me, I've heard my aunty say, oh! Do you want to become a professor before getting married? I say please give me husband like I am not going to like sit and wait to get a husband before attaining whatever I want to do in life. (Iwao, personal communication, September 6, 2020)

For Eyis, she overcame the sociocultural barriers because of the support she got from her families, friends and her self-determination helped a lot as well.

I had the support of my family and my parents and that helped me to weather a lot of things. So, when my aunties are talking, my dad is like no, and my mum was at some point indifferent. Though, she later got into it and was like we can't place your life on hold because you're not married or you don't have a man or children. So, I should keep going on...secondly, I told myself that this is what I want to do, and that has kept me going, the self-determination that I want to be in this, actually kept me going too. (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Discussion. The act of staying focused and not seeing failure as an option were the steps taken by female participants to overcome the Nigerian socio-cultural challenges they face. Math mentioned how determined she was, and she rose to the department head. Determination is seeing oneself as a decision-maker without any external influence (Dattilo, Kleiber, & Williams, 1998). Onons and Math shared how their determination helped them to overcome the sociocultural challenges. For Onons, she never saw failure as an option. Even when family members were complaining of her age, and that she was not married, she never allowed her environment and social influences to interfere in her career aspiration. This corroborates with Deci and Ryan's assertion (1985) that self-determination deals with autonomy and the ability to choose options. Therefore, Onons was determined against all odds to achieve her aim of getting an education despite her age and the pressure to get married.

In the same vein, Iwao was determined and listened to her inner thought. She explained that whenever anyone complained about her decision, she gave them immediate response and moved on with her life. To her, there was no room for external influence in her decision-making.

This explained how autonomy in a male-centered Nigerian society was important to the participants. Because she was determined to fulfill her educational attainment needs, Iwao developed her competence by focusing on her education and she explained that this helped her to be autonomous.

From birth, children learn the traits to exhibit in their lifetime through socialization (Mensah, & Kuranchie, 2013). The home environment is the first point of socialization that Eyis capitalized on to overcome her challenge. Eyis explained how her professor was not ready to supervise her for her doctoral degree, she also talked about how people were complaining that she was not married. However, she was supported at home by her parents which serves as her strength in overcoming the challenge. She also talked about how she has been trained to believe in herself by her parents right from childhood. Therefore, she sees no reason to allow people's opinions to deter her. In sum, Onons, Math, Eyis, and Iwao believe so much in their strength and focus on this. As such, they were able to overcome the challenges that society imposed on them regarding their career and educational attainment.

Professional Life and Fulfillment. What inspired these participants and how fulfilled are they? Most of the women I interviewed talked about how they changed their profession at one point or the other. Although most of them thought they were not successful professionally, they all mentioned how they found fulfillment in what they were doing. I also noticed that they all used success and fulfillment interchangeably. For Mijo, who was forced to study English education in her first degree instead of her desired accounting, she shared how she thought she was not yet fulfilled.

Right now, I wouldn't say I have gotten to that fulfillment point. I am still on a verge of attaining more heights in my higher education. And yes, higher education has helped mold me to

want to attain more and there is no limit to fulfillment...But my level of success is the point I want to get to and feel I have achieved something. I can go into any room, any board, and face them. No matter how high of profession the people in the room might be, I should still find my confidence. (Mijo, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Shia felt she was not at the peak of her career yet because she was a work in progress and hope to achieve more by advancing in her educational pursuit. Dula, is an English language teacher who shared that just as learning is a continuum, attaining the peak of one's career and finding fulfillment is also a continuum. She explained that

...I can't tell you that I've found all the fulfillment I want. I'm finding fulfillment; the fulfillment is still ongoing. It's still an ongoing thing because I'm still developing myself professionally. ...Because when you don't move with the trends, the world will leave you behind. So, you need to understand how things work per time because things keep evolving as we keep going. (Dula, personal communication, September 12, 2020)

Just like Dula, Eyis explained that fulfillment and success are subjective. She saw herself as a successful person because she was contented with what she has and where she was. She was also not intimidated by other people's success stories. Onons, despite having a well-paid job before relocating to Scotland thought she was not fulfilled yet because she felt she still has a long way to go. She shared that

I am not at the peak of my career. I still have a lot to achieve. So I am not at the peak of my career. I am not satisfied and fulfilled professionally because I believe that there is a lot more, I can achieve a whole lot more. (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Owoks explained how she was neither a failure nor a successful person professionally. This was because she hoped to further her education and be chartered as an accountant. Meanwhile, she expressed how she enjoyed her present occupation and the experience she was getting.

I'll say yes to the extent of what I've achieved in life. I can say I'm being successful because if I had not had the experience I had, I would not have known much considering what I know now. I'm not a chartered accountant yet and remember that I just have a B.Sc.; I've not had my Master's or a doctorate. So, I still have a long way to go. But so far, if I want to look back, I'll say I'm successful especially in this present profession (Owoks, personal communication, September 10, 2020).

Oyins objectively felt she was not fulfilled yet because she has not been able to make an impact as she would have loved to. She stated that

Fulfillment is relative. For me, to be fulfilled is being able to reach thousands of people, reach so many people to impact what I have. But for me, I have not been able to do that. I have not been able to air my views. I have not been able to showcase what I have, what I can give the world. So, I will say no; I am not successful. (Oyins, personal communication, September 16, 2020)

Like other participants, Funo also sees herself as a work in progress but feels successful in her way. With her credentials, Neko thought she was successful, even though she was still on the ladder to achieving more.

...I think I'm successful. I'm not where I want to be in the grand scheme of things but I'm heading there. I'm on the path to that place. There is more that I can still do, there is more that I want to do and I'm just slowly approaching that point. But for where I am

right now, based on my credentials and based on the efforts I put in, I think, yes, I'm successful. (Neko, personal communication, September 7, 2020).

Discussion. Although fulfillment and success are both relative and subjective, some of the participants in this study felt fulfilled in their careers. Some also saw themselves as a work in progress because they saw fulfillment as something unending. While most of them attributed their fulfillment/ success to their educational attainment, Babs did not attribute her success to education. She saw herself as a successful person because of her resilience and hardworking attitude. She also talked about how creativity and perseverance have helped her to be successful.

In defining career success, cultural context, gender, occupational type, and a country's economic development are important (Benson, McIntosh, Salazar, & Vaziri, 2020). Therefore, the participants defined their success based on their gender, occupation type, Nigeria's economic status, and cultural values. For example, Oyins and Mijo saw themselves as not fulfilled because of the standard they set for themselves as females in Nigeria. Oyins' standard was based on her gender and personality. She hoped to have career success and make an impact. Unfortunately, she was not making that impact since she got married. Mijo and Alew also felt not fulfilled because they were not practicing what they studied in school. Therefore, they view themselves as unsuccessful because of their occupation.

The native theory of success is the yardstick used to measure success as laid down by the elders/ role models in the society/ community (Ogbu, 1981). Alew who at one point in the interview said she was not successful because of her career later mentioned that she was successful. Her reason for using two-edge was because of the context. Relating to Ogbu's native theory of success, Alew said she was successful because she thought she achieved more than her parents and they are proud of her. Neko explained how successful she was, and she hoped to

guide other women to be successful. Indeed, she saw success as empowering others for everyone to be successful.

Babs felt like she was successful in her career even though she was yet to have her university degree, she got positive outcomes with her experience at work (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom 2007; Benson et al., 2020). She shared how most people were surprised that she has no bachelor's degree and doing an excellent job in her career. This success she attributed to resilience and focus. Looking at career success as a subjectively defined phenomenon (Benson et al., 2020), Owoks thought that she was neither succeeding nor failing in her career. She was not a failure because she was making money to support her family's finance and derives fulfillment in her job role. This supports the assertion that success relates to cultural values and norms to shape a person's definition of career success (Spurk, Hirschi, & Dries, 2018). She also thought she was not successful because she had to change her career. When asked why she had to change her career, she talked about the prospect of her new job and to meet her financial needs.

To contradict McFadden's (1997) opinion that poverty radiates on women and that poverty is a mechanism to silence women, Eyis and Neko felt successful in their careers. They explained how they can cater to their needs and are very content with what they have become. Deea with her education felt not so fulfilled but she explained that with her career, she has a voice, and she was always heard because of her intellectual contribution to matters. According to Peterson & Barreto, (2014), people's interpretation of expertise and fulfillment is cultural and based on interactions with the environment one is in (Peterson & Wood, 2008). Interestingly, Onons, Funo, Dula, and Shia talked about how their definition of success was based on their interactions with the new environment. For instance, Onons said she still has a long way to go when she compared her career success with that of her contemporaries in the new environment

(Scotland). Meanwhile, she explained how she saw herself as a successful person when she was in Nigeria because of her take-home salary. Because of the influence that continuous interactions with others in similar situations have on cognitive structures and thinking (Peterson & Wood, 2008), Shia's definition of career fulfillment was changing because of her interactions with her classmates and professors in an American classroom.

Synthesis. With the various challenges that the Nigerian females face in their career inspiration, the participants in this study can still share their stories of different things they did to overcome these challenges. The unmarried participants have fewer challenges when compared to the married participants. The married participants in my study shared how they must wear many hats of a mother, wife, and career person at the same time. Despite these challenges, some of them thought they were fulfilled in their career and family while some of them thought they were not fulfilled.

For the unmarried ones, their challenges were based on non-acceptance to pursue their goal. An instance was Eyis' experience whose supervisor was reluctant to accept her for the doctoral degree because she was unmarried. However, her focus and determination helped her. She also felt fulfilled because she was content and never felt intimidated. Even when all these participants attributed their fulfillment to education, Babs's definition of success contradicts Fitzsimons's (2017) assertion that education helped in developing a worthwhile human capital. This is because Babs' career fulfillment was not because of her education but because of her resilience and hard work.

Theme Four: Education-Empowering Female Identity

Identity stems from childhood upbringing which relates to values inculcated from home and the community. It is also what the participants saw themselves to be in terms of their human

agency and perception of self. An example is the identity of all the participants as Nigerians and as females. The description of their attributes also characterizes identity in this study. All the participants in this study saw how their perspectives on life were changed because of their educational attainment. Most of them attributed their personality and identity development to the challenges they overcame as Nigerian females. They also emphasized the role of education in enhancing their strong human agency. They all talked about their human agency in the sense of their creativity, resilience, and determination. Going through challenges and overcoming them help them to enhance their human agency, which is an important part of developing identity. All participants except Babs associated their identity formation with their educational attainment. They explained how education has brought them to the limelight and enlightened them on who they are and what they can do as human beings. Therefore, the theme of education, personality, and identity development has been categorized into a broad umbrella of human agency and forming independent identity.

Human Agency. This is the capacity of a person to make intentional choices for taking a particular action that shapes their lives (Mayr, 2011). This study's participants identified their human agency regarding how they stood for themselves despite the societal dictates on what is expected of Nigerian females. They shared how their education has helped them in enhancing their human agency. As educated and well-exposed ladies, they expressed their agency in making decisions about their lives, be expressive, being vocal, and maintaining control of their situations regardless of what society expected from them. Deea talked about how education has given her a voice to the point of making herself heard. She explained that

I think education has really given me a voice and with my personality, if you don't want to hear me, you will hear me by force. I always argue my point to the point of exhaustion on the part of my audience. (Deea, personal communication, September 17, 2020)

Neko on her part related to why her education journey was important to her. She said that it would help her guide others because she has once been on the journey. While she felt that the education path was not an easy one, she was willing to use her agency to inform others who wants to tow the path. Dula shared how education was enlightening thereby making her well respected and marketable because she knew her onion as a teacher. She said that

Education has contributed a lot. I mean, if you think education is expensive, try ignorance. When you are enlightened, you have something to offer, people will always look for you. You are like a problem solver. Being an English teacher, you know how marketable our subject is. People are looking for English teachers everywhere and it's not that they are looking for just any English teacher. I've been successful and I look forward to more successes...I try as much to commit myself to the lives of these kids... (Dula, personal communication, September 12, 2020)

Eyis felt that her education helped in developing a self in her. She had a voice and no reason to be ashamed of where she was in life.

I must say that I feel good and excited that I'm able to have my education and most of the time, it gives me a voice. I may not have the money or a good job but I'm a work in progress and I appreciate where I am now...education has helped me to understand that our measure of success, is not just about money and the physical things that we can see...it has helped my identity and sense of being (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Deea also shared how she was not bothered about what society says that she was not married in her 30s. She explained how she will buy a car regardless of her gender and even marital status. Yora saw spontaneity and the ability to think creatively as her agency.

I guess what's unique about me that serves as my agency is the ability to think creatively and also on the spot, most times, I perform when I don't have things planned out, I tend to be very spontaneous (Yora, personal, September 25, 2020)

Math is a resilient and determined woman whose agency has helped her to be the best during her post-graduate years despite managing a home and career.

I'm a goal-getter, if I want something I put in the work and I go get it, and having the best result in Post-graduate... It's about two to three hours journey from my house to the school, sometimes I leave quite late, I get home around 11pm sometimes 12 midnight. Yes, I meet clients, fortunately, I've got a good staff and I do and still do division of labour, so I just get report from the head of departments, and it has helped me. (Math, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

Discussion. The development of identity is a lifetime achievement (Bang & Zhou, 2014). In a cultural context, this may be subjective but looking at one's upbringing, identity is also formed (Erikson, 1963). Apart from the home upbringing as a determinant of identity formation, the participants in this study talked about how educational challenges and educational opportunities have helped them in their identity development as well as their human agency. In this context, education is what the participants engaged in as a way of developing their human agency. Since what an individual engage in has a strong impact on an individual's life (Bandura, 2018), Deea, Neko, Dula, Eyis, Yora, Math, and Lata shared how educational engagement has empowered them to build their human agency.

Deea, Dula, and Eyis' experiences can be used to accept Bandura's (2018) opinion that the development of self has enlightened her and made her well respected. She was well respected by her parents and siblings because she contributed financially and intellectually when the need arises. Therefore, she was respected for being single and not discriminated against despite being in her 30s and still unmarried. This corresponds to the assertion that education is a status symbol marker (Obindah & Osara, 2019). Eyis contentment and development of self was what she saw as great empowerment. This was made achievable due to her educational attainment.

Directedness is part of human agency. Self-directedness according to Bandura (2018) is regarded as a personality trait of self-determination. It is one's ability to choose and adapt to situations that will help one achieve a personally desired goal (Cloninger, 2013). For example, Deea said she was not bothered to get a car even when she was not married. Her self-directedness and knowing what she wanted to be made it possible to refute the assertion that women cannot own properties in Nigeria especially in the Southern part of Nigeria (Nwogu, 2015).

As a result of education, Yora has been able to see herself as a spontaneously creative lady who was happy with herself. Math and Lata also thought that their resilience and achievement were due to their educational attainment. Therefore, they can carve a niche for themselves and strengthen their human agency. Because they have experienced different challenges like discrimination, tagged weaker ones, and face the hurdles of managing a home and career as Nigerian women, their ability to come to terms with their enhanced human agency (as multitasker with creative tendencies) made me classify them as identity achievers. This is because "identity achievers have explored identity alternatives and have committed to a firm sense of identity" (Bang & Zhou, 2014, p.435). For example, Lata has experienced life in the ghetto as an orphan and experienced a serene life in an American classroom setting (as a student

and instructor). The various identity alternatives she has experienced and her strong sense of knowin25g who she was after her experience in the American classroom helped in her identity achievement.

Because learning is a continuum that never ends (Omolewa, 2007), Neko's education has empowered her to yearn for more knowledge. She was also willing to guide other females, especially Nigerian females, to attain education. She explained that she would use the educational experiences she has acquired to guide others to the right path. She submitted by saying that one rises by lifting others. In conclusion, the female participants in this study all agreed to the empowering impact of education in the enhancement of their human agency.

Forming Identity. The home is key to an individual's development in all ramifications. Identity formation is also rooted in the child's socialization from home through upbringing (Erikson, 1963). For this reason, some of the participants talked about how they formed their identity not only at home but in school as well. For example, Deea shared how her upbringing in line with her education helped in forming an independent identity. She narrated that

Let me say that I know what I want. But sometimes, even the most willed among us get broken. ...it's just not about my knowing what I want. It's about other factors...other help that I got from people, but most especially from my mother and my siblings...experience is also very crucial in building my identities and personality. (Deea, personal communication, September 17, 2020)

She also mentioned how she was decisive and independent financially. She felt her personality was also a factor. Yora's self-awareness and life reality were part of her identity. She attributed this to her education especially as a literary student.

Education has helped me developed my identity and personality...education has made me aware of my identity as a female and some people have some problem with that, education has also helped me developed my personality because now I'm aware of my identity and I know that trouble a lot of people, and as a literary student we do a lot of feminist literary criticism, so we're reading all these things and I'm aware of all these things...I'm aware of the realities of these issues, it's not just on paper or stories that happened in the past, and I'm aware of these facts and I'm also able to act on this awareness. (Yora, persoal commuication, September 25, 2020)

For Math, she saw her career achievement, confidence, and charisma as her peculiar identities. She attributed these to her education. Due to circumstance, Babs was yet to complete her bachelor's degree at the time of the interview. However, she expressed how her determination, resilience, and the company she kept has helped in her identity formation that

Yeah, the determination. Just like an adage that says the kind of people you surround yourself with have a role it plays in your life...The kind of knowledge and understanding I have gotten from people I mingle with make me understand that some certain things are not worth it and I keep developing myself (Babs, personal communication, September 15, 2020).

Eyis saw variation in her identity depending on the context or situation at hand. She said:

Identity is very broad and I would say it's not easy for me to say this is who I am because as humans we take different identity depending on situations...when I go into the market, I'm not the same person I am when I am in school when I am teaching I am not the same person when I am relating to you as a colleague. Well, I don't live in a box, and I'm very resilient. (Eyis, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Alew explained that she never allowed her upbringing to deter her. She saw herself as an independently introverted and decisive person. She explained that,

Even if I was pampered, I still as an individual live much of independent life and deep down in me, I use to feel what if I don't have my parents, I could do this and do that on my own which has actually helped me and also shape me to be kind of person I am today (Alew, personal communication, September 12, 2020).

Discussion. As against the assertion that women's main role is to care for and nurture the family (Makama, 2013), the participants in my study all have an identity of self. They were all women who were independent in deciding what to do. A common identity to the participants is that they were all Nigerian females. However, they never allowed the sociocultural beliefs to make them limit their identity to the homestead. Identity as a subjective concept was interpreted from a different lens by all the participants. To support the claim that identity is the consistent unique attribute of an individual (Buckingham, 2008), Yora shared how she has self-awareness of her identity through education. She further explained that the reality of life dawned on her due to her field of study as a literary student. She felt that her understanding of feminism and the need to be fair on women was due to her education.

Although identity development is influenced by early socialization by parents and sociocultural beliefs (Erikson, 1963), Deea's outlook on identity development and experience contradicts this claim. This is because, she saw herself as a strong-willed lady, whose experience has helped her to be decisive and needs no approval from anyone. While it is a not-so-acceptable sociocultural belief for an unmarried lady to own a car, Deea is a financially independent young lady who shared that she would buy a car and cares less about what society says. Therefore, she

has been able to build her identity, not in line with the societal dictates for a Nigerian woman. Math on her own saw her good charisma, confidence, and career achievement as her identity.

In the same vein, as Bang and Zhou (2014) submit that “identity achievement is related to positive cognitive and socioemotional development in adolescence” (p. 434), Lata, Eyis, and Alew shared how their identities are built because of their cognitive development. Cognitive development here is based on the knowledge acquired due to their educational exposure. It deals with their intellectual prowess. They are optimistic that the achievement is because of their exposure to education, especially higher education. The introvertedly shy Lata and Alew talked about how expressive they were because of their educational attainment. Lata specifically said she would not want to be silent when there is discussion in the class or elsewhere. As such, her education has enhanced her cognitive development, thereby enabling her to contribute meaningfully and intellectually to discussions. For Babs, her resilience and careful selection of friends have helped her in developing her identity and she was better for it as her group of friends was very helpful to her.

In a nutshell, education has played a pivotal role in the identity development of the participants in my study. Even when identity is seen as ambiguous and slippery to define (Buckingham, 2008), Eyis still helped to understand it by saying that she puts on different identities that are based on the situation or context she finds herself in.

Synthesis. According to Fawole, Ajuwon, and Osungbade (2004), education helps in the identity development of Nigerian females. The authors concluded on this based on their study in Ibadan, Nigeria. To relate the outcome of their study to my present study, there is a corollary that educational attainment is crucial to strengthening the human agency and identity development of an individual. The female participants in my study explained the importance of education in

enhancing their human agency and identity development. They also talked about how education has given them a voice in a society where women are silenced. Therefore, the role of education in empowering Nigerian females in the male-centered society cannot be overemphasized.

Overarching Themes: Culture and Gender Stigma

The commonness of the participants' lived experiences and the diversity of Nigeria made this study broad especially when there is a representation of major ethnic groups among the participants. Despite the broad spectrum of the cultural beliefs and values, there is still an iota of similarities in the participants' experiences on how the culture poses threats to the females.

In a bid to be culturally competent, one tends to be pressured by societal dictates but most of the participants shared how they were not socially pressured to abide by the cultural values. Rather, the support and upbringing from their parents helped them to imbibe the family values at the expense of societal cultural values. Religiously, there were some restrictions on the females. While this was seen to be common among the Muslims in the North, some Christian religious beliefs restrict women especially unmarried women from taking part in some religious activities. Therefore, the overarching theme of culture and gender stigma has three subthemes. These subthemes include cultural heterogeneity versus homogeneity, cultural values versus family values, and cultural stereotypes. The lived experiences of the women and ladies in this study are used to explain these overarching themes.

Cultural Heterogeneity vs Homogeneity. Nigeria is a heterogeneous nation with diverse cultural values, the experiences shared by the participants in this study are homogenous as they experience female treatment in similar ways. Talking about Nigeria, all the participants talked about how each tribe has its unique culture but reflectively, the varied cultures represent Africa with the gender construct of subsuming female under male. For example, Neko and Chia

are both Igbo ladies but their experiences regarding preference for a male child are like that of Eyis, Oyins, and Iwao who are Yorubas. Neko explained how she was able to compare girls' education in her tribe to that of the Northern part of Nigeria. She figured out that there is seemingly no difference except that they are progressing a bit in her tribe. According to her,

I'll say Nigerian culture is diverse as we have a lot of tribes and each tribe has its own unique culture. Out of all the African countries, I think Nigeria is one of the biggest when it comes to such diversity...But with the diversity comes similarities as well when looked at in-depth. I'm from Abia State. I'm Ibo. What I wanted to say about Nigerian diversity is that I grew up in Abuja. Abuja is the melting pot being the capital city ...for my tribe, I'll say when it comes to the education of the girl child, I'll say my tribe has made progress a bit in Nigeria. I got to the North and I'm able to compare to some extent.

(Neko, personal communication, September 2020)

Neko also talked about gender roles in the house which is common to other participants in the study despite coming from a different ethnic group. She said that she was made to do all the chores as the only female while her brothers sat in the living room to watch TV. This made her brother not know how to cook or other household chores. Talking about the heterogeneity of Nigeria but homogenous in cultural perception, Neko talked about the societal bias of expecting females to get married at a certain age. The aspect of pressurizing females to get married at a certain age was mentioned by almost all the participants. The married participants feel successful because they are married. The unmarried ones share how they care less about the societal pressure and all they are doing is to focus on their career.

Like Neko's experience was that of Eyis, a Yoruba lady, whose family has only a male child but three females. Eyis explained how the boy was named Okanlawon (the one who

supersedes all), overpampered, and not allowed to do any chores. She explained that the act of favoring the *Okanlawon* made her rebellious at home because she expected to be pampered as the last child of the family and not the other way round.

Relating to the inculcation of male superiority tenets on the boy child from childhood as a homogenous feature of the Nigerian culture can be explained by using Chia, Iwao, and Oyins' lived experiences. Chia is an Igbo lady who was trained to always serve the male child. She explained how this seems to influence her self-esteem unconsciously. Just as Chia, Iwao is a Yoruba lady whose younger brother will not do any chores because of his gender. All efforts to make him do chores were abortive as shared by Iwao. She gave an example that if the boy was asked to wash five pots, he will reluctantly wash two and just keep the remaining three pots under the sink. For Oyins, she explained how she was restricted but the brothers were given freedom and sent on errands outside the home.

Discussion. The heterogeneous nature of Nigeria is reflected in my choice of participant selection. This is because the participants in my study are from almost the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, the heterogeneity of the cultural beliefs is somewhat homogenous as well based on the lived experiences of participants in my study. As a heterogeneous country with over 250 ethnic groups and about 500 languages and diverse cultures (Falola & Heaton, 2008), it is expected that gender treatment will be diverse as well. However, the participants' stories in my study refute the assertion of diversity. For example, Neko's treat as the only female to do all the household chores was like that of Eyis whose only brother is regarded as *okanlawon* and does not do any chores.

Similarly, Chia who is an Igbo lady has been ingrained to always serve the boys, do all household chores because of her gender. Iwao and Oyins are Yorubas and they share similar

stories. Then, the poser becomes where is the cultural heterogeneity in the treatment of females? To validate Aina's (1998) opinion that patriarchy places constraints on the girl child while the boy enjoys freedom, Oyins and Iwao from the South western (Yorubas) experienced this, and Chia who is from the South eastern part (Igbo) also experienced this. It can then be said that, while culture is peculiar to a group of people, there is usually an iota of commonness in cultural beliefs especially as it pertains to gender treatment.

In terms of education, Neko talked about how females were restricted from attaining education among the Hausas which usually happens among the Igbos as well. Though, she explained that the situation was better among the Igbos when compared to what is happening among the Hausas. In terms of education acquisition, girls were discriminated against, and therefore, they are mostly used as house helps traders who hawk on the street, forced to prostitution, and human trafficking (Makama, 2013). Makama's claim is supported by what Neko shared that girls are not educated especially when there is a financial crisis in the home.

Nonyelu (2009) defines culture as the totality of a given people's way of life. Cultural homogeneity (culture sameness) is undisputable since people are people everywhere. Speaking a different language or belonging to a different planet in the hemisphere does not mean people will be different. If we are looking at Nigeria's heterogeneity as it pertains to female treatment, why then do we have the feminist movement advocating for equal gender treatment in the world?

Forced to Submit to Cultural Expectations. The participants in this study shared how the society sets standards for the female. Therefore, their cultural competence level was tested if they were unable to adapt socially to the standards set by the society. For example, society expects one to get married at a particular age, get things done, expect them to take a particular career and all. Most of the participants talked about society discriminating against them for not

adhering to societal dictates but most times, they get support from their parents thereby making them ignore the societal expectations. It should be noted that this cultural competence cuts across all facets of life thereby humiliating those that do not adhere to it. Communalism, traditional beliefs, and religious dictates are all part of the cultural competence that if not followed, sentiments come in and people are discriminated against.

Religiously, there is no participant in this study that has a lived experience regarding the need to adjust to traditional religion in Nigeria. However, Onons shared how she was discriminated against in the Catholic church because she was not married. She narrated that

...let me put it to the Christian part; I am a Catholic and there is this organization we have in the Catholic society for the female Christian women organization...Now the whole ideology is that either you are in C.W.O (The Catholic Women Organization) or you are in the youth, you know at 30 you can't call yourself a youth anymore you are mature, you might not be married but I believe you should be a woman...As a woman that I was 33 at a time, they expected me to be in the youth organization because I wasn't married...I think it is even so bad that if you are married and you join the organization and you don't have a child, I don't think you can join the Catholic Mother's Organization. I think it is wrong so for me those are the kind of cultural things that affected women (Onons, personal communication, September 7, 2020)

As the first child whose parent has only female children and are from a royal family, Yora shared how her father was proud of her as she hopes to retain her father's name.

As the first child, I grew up very defensive towards my dad and I was also very protective of my mom's feelings. I also had this mentality that even when I get married, I would still retain my father's name, because there was no boy child to carry on that legacy, so it

made my dad very excited and I think these are one of the reasons that made me follow his academic path because I've always tried to prove myself to show that being a girl child does not mean I cannot do these things. (Yora, personal communication, September 25, 2020)

She also said that because she saw nothing wrong in taking over her dad's traditional role as Mogaji (which is the prerogative right of the men), her father was proud of her courage. This she narrated that

Something happened recently, my dad just got this 'Mogaji' title of our hometown and he gave a very emotional speech because the attire he wore was the attire his father had worn, so he got the title early this year which was 47 years after his father had died, my mom now spoke to me that she overheard one of the family members speaking that, since everyone calls him prof, 'ti prof ba ti gbe ewu yen sile n sin, omo wo lo wa fe gbewo' (when prof takes off the garment, which child would wear it), jokingly I now said 'they obinrin o kin je Mogaji ni' (can't women bear the title of Mogaji), I think that was the only time my dad has ever told me that he likes my courage that I don't see myself as inferior to males (Yora, personal communication, September 25, 2020)

Discussion. Religion is another instrument of discrimination against women in Nigeria. According to Atttoh (2017), "the tension between religion and gender equality is a pervasive problem for orthodox Christianity despite its cardinal doctrine of equality of all beings before God" (p.158). Atttoh's opinion relates to Onons' experience who was discriminated against in the Catholic church because she was unmarried. Looking at cultural competence as the ability to perform a culturally specified socially valued role and task in a society (Ogbu, 1981), Onons competence was tested but because of the need to belong, she said she could not speak up since

she is seen as incompetent based on her unmarried status. What she did was to be mute to feel culturally competent at that time.

Relatively, Yora hoped to retain her father's name to meet the societal needs of continuity of her father's lineage and name regardless of her gender. In consonance with Ogbu's (1981) emphasis on instrumental competence that meets societal needs and the cultural tasks that are appropriate to age, sex, and other criteria of distinction (Ogbu, 1981), Yora was excited to wear her father's cloth and become the *mogaji*. Even though this wearing of *mogaji* is for the male child, Yora was not hesitant to wear it because, she wants to feel instrumentally competent and make her father proud as well. Hence, she wanted to justify the fact that, all forms of gender disparity should be avoided in her culture.

Cultural Values vs Family Values. In terms of cultural and societal values, many of the participants shared how they saw their cultural values as obsolete and oppressive for women. They narrated how their families tend to flow with the trend of doing what suited them and not the cultural beliefs. However, to be acceptable in the community, they still adhered to some societal dictates diplomatically. In terms of property ownership like land and cars, women are prevented from obtaining such because society seems to see a lady with a car as arrogant. Most of the participants shared how they hear this a lot. Some of them, especially the participants in the US talked about how they were not bothered about this. Yora narrated one of the cultural values that she saw as a challenge of how she was not expected to drive a car as a corp member. This is because driving a car as a young graduate and unmarried would make suitors afraid of coming. She explained that

I remember when I was serving, I used to drive one tiny car like that and the head editor of my department that time was like how would I get a man when I'm always in a car and

the man might not be walking on the streets... (Yora, personal communication, September 25, 2020)

Like what Yora shared, Owoks mother's values aligned with that of society. But Owoks felt that it was a good thing for her. This is because she thought that not acquiring any property before marriage would make her be submissive and enjoy her matrimonial home. She narrated that

When I was doing my Industrial Training and I got some money, I remember my mom would always say that it's better you keep your money rather than buying property. She advised that I keep it till I got married and when I married, I could buy everything I wanted. Yes, that is it. Our own belief in Nigeria is that when you have these things the men will be saying that you'll be too proud to manage. (Owoks, personal communication, September 10, 2020).

Discussion. The family as the microcosm of the larger society wielded a lot of influence in the upbringings and socialization of the child. The parents' exposure to education also goes a long way in the type of exposure they give to the child as well. Looking at Yora and Owoks experiences, it is obvious that they both had a different upbringing. Yora's upbringing was more family-oriented and somewhat against the cultural belief of preventing a girl from owning properties. This is because, as a corp (a mandatory one-year service to the country after the completion of a university or higher national diploma degree) member in Nigeria and riding a car, it means that you are of high socioeconomic status and well exposed to opportunities which may intimidate men. Using a car at that age and someone telling you that there will be no man to marry you showed the level of insecurity that Nigerian men could have. However, Yora was not bothered because, she felt she has been trained by her parents especially her father, who was a

university professor that she should not allow any societal beliefs to deter/suppress her. She also saw this as a strength to her human agency. In contrast, Owoks was making money on her own but her mother advised her not to buy land. This was because her mother believed in the societal dictates that prevent women from acquiring properties or even inheriting one.

Synthesis. Because of the diverse nature of Nigerian society and the number of participants in this study, many overlapping themes have been discussed in different contexts in various themes/ subthemes. However, some distinct overarching themes specifically entail the component of the Nigerian society. One of them is the belief that Nigeria is heterogeneous due to the number of languages being used in the country and the tribes live in a large land. Meanwhile, gender treatment is purely homogenous because of patriarchal beliefs. The homogenous nature of the cultural beliefs especially in treating women cannot be over-emphasized. Family beliefs are also crucial to the understanding of cultural beliefs. It is therefore concluded that the family has a stronger tie in developing a humane and positive attribute in the child to be culturally and instrumentally competent in a homogenous but assumed heterogenous Nigerian culture of female oppression.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the various themes generated and coded from the interview transcripts were analyzed and discussed. In doing the analysis and discussion, close attention was paid to the research question for this study, theoretical framework, and relevant review of the literature. Four major themes were identified with sub-themes. The four themes were home environment and upbringing; Nigerian education and its impact on female empowerment; overcoming educational challenges for career inspiration, and education as empowering tool for female identity. The overarching theme showed the relatedness of some of the themes as well. The

identified themes encompassed the lived experiences of the participants, and this led to the use of heavy quotations to give voice to the participants. The analysis and discussion revealed that despite the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, family upbrings and educational attainment are the key components of identity development for Nigerian women. Educational attainment also played a crucial role in the enhancement and strengthening of the participants' human agency and identity development. Therefore, the various discussions of findings in this study showed how education have helped Nigerian women to build competence, strengthen their human agency, which enabled them to form a strong sense of self.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The goal of this research was to explore how Nigerian women have been able to develop their identity and self-esteem through higher education in a patriarchal Nigerian society. During this study, the 19 participants shared various stories about their lived experiences from childhood to their present state of adulthood. From the interview transcriptions and analysis, most of the participants had a common experience of identity building through higher education. For some, their home environment and upbringing set a clear tone for the gender treatment while others mentioned that there was nothing like gender disparity when growing up. However, all the participants explained how the sociocultural factors and the Nigerian situation posed a lot of threat like harassment, violence, lack of support, a financial constraint which have hindered females from getting to the peak of their careers. The participants who were abroad (US and UK), saw the cultural differences and were hoping to train their children equally regardless of gender.

The role that the environment play in individuals' life was at play (Ogbu, 1981) for all the participants and their ability to resolve the crisis at each stage of their lives (Erikson, 1963) was also crucial to their identity development. Using Babs' experience, she was not able to complete her higher education as at the time of the interview, she had been able to resolve the ego identity because of the trust her educated dad has instilled in her during her early childhood days.

Contrary to the prior assertion of son preference and right to inheritance especially among the Igbos (Nnadi, 2013), Neko who is an Igbo lady explained that this was not in her case. Although she was the only female child, she thought that she was not discriminated against.

The only thing was that she needed to do all the chores, which she felt has helped her now that she was by herself in the United States. All the women interviewed saw the importance of education and emphasized the need to be determined regardless of the societal beliefs of seeing the females as the weak.

Theoretical Implications & Contribution

Environment, upbringing, and sociocultural factors play crucial roles in an individuals' life. This is exemplified by the results of this study. Because all the female participants had been born and raised in Nigeria, they were all socialized into the societal norms and beliefs of patriarchy as a way of adapting to the cultural task to enhance their human competence as Nigerians (Ogbu, 1981). The participants' lived experiences revealed that each child grows in a complex interconnected ecosystem with culture constantly evolving in thoughts and actions (Greene, 1994). The importance of their environment explained the gender norms that pervaded their upbringing as infants on trust, love, and acceptance (Erikson, 1963). Therefore, the training of the female child as not inferior to the male helps in the development of hope and drive in the child, it enables her to believe in herself thereby helping in the ego identity and integrity of the child as an older adult (Erikson, 1963).

According to Ogbu (1981), child-rearing is a culturally organized formula for inculcating competencies. The parenting pattern of the participants' parents explains this as all the participants referred to their parents as playing significant roles in their life trajectories. In the case of Lata, her guardian and the educated people in the *ghetto* environment helped in shaping her perspectives and the need to be a determined person.

Despite reporting that they had successfully resolved their identity crisis at different stages of their life (Erikson, 1963), most participants mentioned that they struggled through early

crises (Erikson, 1963) due to lack of opportunities and exposure to education compared to their male counterparts. Their educational aspiration for higher education prevented them from being stagnant and despairing as adults. For example, Deea and other participants who were unmarried mentioned how they are not despairing about being single. Rather, they were focused on their career to prevent stagnation. Therefore, their ego integrity through higher education made them see the Nigerian socio-cultural belief as something that must not hinder them. This contradicts the interrelatedness of cultural ecology as a way of promoting cultural competence (Ogbu, 1981).

My study further showed that these participants benefited more from the higher education they acquired as they saw education as eye-openers that enhance their creative and critical thinking abilities. This helped them in their advancement, career development, self-esteem, and their social interaction especially for the participants who are abroad. Finally, these stories from the participants showed the need to treat everyone equally regardless of gender. Everyone is important and each person should be treated as such. There is the need to also understand that the sex of a child, which is biologically determined, is based on the egg donated by the man. Therefore, the advocates of son preference especially among the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria should come to this understanding that the men should be blamed if they are in dire need of a son and not frustrating the woman who gives birth to females. Property ownership is also not the prerogative rights of men and in terms of inheritance, equal inheritance rights should be embraced as well.

Practical Implications

After finishing my research, especially the interview transcription, proofreading, and coding, I agreed to the fact that while environment and upbringing play a crucial role in an individual's identity building, the determination of the individual to make a change positively

also matters. The present technology age makes it easier for one to learn about what is obtainable in other cultures and adopt the positive aspect of the culture to change one's life for good.

Inferiority complex should be avoided as well by females.

Implication for Parents

Considering the various challenges that beset female Nigerians due to the cultural beliefs and tenets of society, it can be argued that each child is affected by the home environment right from childhood. Therefore, parents should endeavor to inculcate desirable norms and values in the children about the children's roles and responsibilities at home. Parents should avoid all forms of gender disparity or favoritism in training and treating their children.

Although I agree that people's failure should not be attributed only to the environment, but to developmental deficits which can be corrected through rehabilitation (Ogbu, 1981), Lata and Mijo's cases of their *ghetto* environment would have made them see nothing in education and would have not been useful to themselves. However, they chose to have a positive outlook on life and they are better human beings for that approach. Therefore, rehabilitation helped in this regard.

Looking at Ogbu's native theory of success as an embodiment of child-rearing techniques, who children see as role models and what the society perceives as a success. Parents need to be good role models to their children. This is because the mind of the child is a *tabula rasa* and whatever is planted from childhood lingers on. Owoks' upbringing can be used to portray this. Her parents ensured everyone pounded yam every other day by taking turns. This she saw as something enhancing her relationship and independence as an adult. Yora's father was her role model and listening to him give a speech made her changed her mind in choosing her career. She felt she was better for it and mentioned that she hoped to keep making her father

proud. Therefore, parents need to be good examples to the children. When parents are socializing the children into the societal tenets, the positive aspect should always be considered.

Because women are traditionally excluded from ownership of landed property, which is culturally the exclusive preserve of men, the only possessions that can be labeled as the property of a wife are her basket, calabash, cocoa farm, cooking utensils, and water pot, especially among the Igbos. Therefore, developing a healthy personality starts from birth is important. This is because it would enable the child to be primarily trusting and aware of environmental signals (Erikson, 1963) that are liberatory.

The Implication for Education Policymakers

In Nigeria, most political offices are occupied by men. In empowering women, the government should give women a chance. They should be empowered and speak up to be a part of the government policymakers. This would help them to represent females well. This is because females can represent fellow women well as they understand women's needs and aspirations better than men.

In the same vein, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA) emphasized the education of the girls. However, financial constraints and socioeconomic status usually prevent parents from sending their girls to school. What this means is that government should endeavor to ensure that education is truly free up to the university level. Where a student is unable to pay certain student fees, the government should make financial aid provisions for indigent students to ensure that no child is left out because of financial constraints.

Based on the interviews done for this study, most of the participants talked about sexual harassment, violence against women, and rape, especially by the university professors. However, the victims are always unable to speak up because the Nigerian government usually ends up

doing nothing to help the victims who are mostly females. The professors also wield so much power that they are *mini gods*. A rape victim is usually blamed for dressing seductively. As such, most victims do not speak up. When professors fail a student because she refuses the professor's amorous advances, the student is seen as a low-performance student and when the case is raised, the professor wins most times as mentioned by most participants. There seems to be no one challenging the professors regarding these illicit acts. The government should therefore end violence against female students in Nigerian institutions. Government should also be proactive in reprimanding violence against women in Nigeria.

In terms of sexism, the government should ensure that everyone is given an equal right regardless of gender. All forms of glass-ceiling phenomenon on women in the administrative cadre should be avoided. There should also be an awareness that no one is superior to the other because of gender construct in society.

Limitations

In this study, there were many limitations. The first one was related to convenient and purposive sampling. Thus, there could be some bias in the participant selection process. The participants selected were willing to share their lived experiences with me as Nigerian women. They did not mind doing that virtually even when the financial cost of the internet data was on them. Therefore, the familiarity between the researcher and the participants made it challenging for the participants to share some important aspects of their lived experiences especially experiences that may seem shameful for them to talk about. The participants did not also represent the diversity of Nigeria as most of the participants were Southerners and Easterners. The person that ought to represent the Northern part of Nigeria was not available at the time of the interview due to her busy schedule as a graduate student.

Secondly, most of the participants identified themselves as belonging to Gen Y and Z. This made my study more reflective of this narrow demographic. It does not represent the generations before Gen Y and Z. This demographic may have affected a wider perspective of the challenges women face because most of the participants have educated parents who ensured that the participants were educated as well. If there had been participants who were in the previous generations, it may be possible to relate their lived experiences well to the varied challenges women face in the traditional Nigerian society.

Although with phenomenological research and, any research, it can be challenging for the researcher to remain separate from their study (Christensen & Johnson, 2016). My connection to this research is unique because I am a Nigerian woman and I have experienced the phenomenon under study as a Nigerian. This I mentioned in chapter three while discussing epoché. Therefore, my experience impacted the analysis because I could relate to the lived experiences of the participants.

Finally, as a phenomenological study, this study sought to capture the essence of the lived experiences of the 19 Nigerian women as they build their identities and self-esteem through the acquisition of higher education. The findings of this study were not intended for generalizations as people experience similar things in different ways. The experiences are unique and peculiar to each participant. However, their unique experiences and stories will provide insight for many educators, psychologists, and policymakers who are interested in empowering females in Nigeria and possibly globally.

Implications for Further Research

As with any research study, the more that is learned and understood gives room for more questions. This study explored how Nigerian women saw education as a status symbol and to

help break away from the patriarchal Nigerian society. In this study, educational aspiration was an important part of identity building. In this research, I only had one participant who did not attain higher education. Thus, how women are empowered and giving a voice apart from having a higher educational qualification can be explored in future research.

Also, based on the exposure of some participants to the western world, their perceptions towards patriarchy have changed. Future research, therefore, can address a cross-cultural gender norm between African women and western women. Future research could also compare gender norms in the different parts of Nigeria especially among the Igbos and Hausas. This is because the Igbos are so keen on son preference while the Hausas believe in the Islamic doctrine thereby restricting their women to the wearing of purdah and homebound in most cases. Research on how men feel about the education of Nigerian females could also be considered. A final suggestion is that this study is repeated, but in a different part of the world probably in East Asia.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Home Environment (About Growing Up)

? Who are you and where are you from? Personal info, age, where from and general info

? Please, tell me about your childhood – what was growing up in your house like? Who would you say raised you?

? Were you trained/ treated differently because of your gender as a female while growing up?

Educational Experiences and Challenges

? What are some challenges you think Nigerian females encounter on the way to attain higher education?

? What is your purpose of attaining a higher education?

? Could you share your education experiences? Did your education help you to achieve what you want professionally? If not, what were the challenges?

? As a Nigerian female, what is your professional life like?

? Do you consider yourself as a successful individual? Are you satisfied professionally? What is the role of higher education in your success?

Culture and Sociocultural Influences

? What can you say about Nigerian culture? Do you have just one culture or there is diversity

? Please can you tell me about your culture/ ethnicity?

? As a female Nigerian, are there any cultural expectations and practices that hindered you academically, financially, professionally and/ or maritally? If yes, what are these limitations and how have you been able to overcome these?

? What was your upbringing like and how did it influence you as a female?

? How and why does your culture treat male and females differently?

? Does your culture enable you to attain material needs immediately or to relax?

Identity

? What is unique about who you are?

? How has education influenced your identity and personality?

APPENDIX B. IRB TRAINING CERTIFICATE

BGSU

Bowling Green State
University

Training Date:
November 12, 2019

Office of Research
Compliance 310 Hayes Hall
Bowling Green, OH 43403-
0183 Phone: (419) 372-7716
E-mail: orc@bgsu.edu

December 5, 2019

To Whom It May Concern:

On the date listed above, Yetunde Alabede completed the training offered by Bowling Green State University (BGSU) for researchers who use human subjects. The training covered modules similar in content to those developed by the National Institutes of Health for intramural researchers. The following topics were included:

- History of abuse of human subjects
- Ethical principles and guidelines for the use of human subjects
- Federal regulations
- BGSU policies and procedures
- Investigator responsibilities
- IRB responsibilities

Sincerely,



Dr. Montana Miller
Research Compliance Officer

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW FLIER

Looking for Nigerian Female Research Participants

✂ **Research topics: Higher education as a tool for identity building and self-empowerment for Nigerian females – A Qualitative Study**

✂ **About the Study:**

Hi! My name is Yetunde S Alabede, and I am a graduate student at Bowling Green State University studying Cross-cultural and International Education. I am working on my thesis with Dr.Hyeyoung Bang as my supervisor on the topic “**Exploring female Nigerian’s higher education experiences for building identity and empowering self OR Higher education as a tool for identity building and self-empowerment for Nigerian females.**”

You are invited to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to that the purpose of this study is to explore female Nigerian’s higher education experiences for building identity and empowering self. The total time to participate in this study will be 1 hour.

✂ **What you do during the participation:**

- 1) Filling out a demographic questionnaire about yourself (Education level, tribe, marital status, occupation, age, family, etc.)
- 2) Sharing your experience as a Nigerian female.

✂ **Who can participate: 15-20 Female Nigerians**

Graduate, undergraduate, professional, and unprofessional Nigerian ladies/women

✂ Participant's consent is important

✂ **Research Place: Online**

✂ **How to participate and additional inquiries: Please contact us.**

- Yetunde S Alabede, Graduate Student, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, Bowling Green State University, Email: yalabed@bgsu.edu (910) 364 4064
- Dr. Hyeyoung Bang, Ph.D. (P.I.) Associate Professor, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, Bowling Green State University, Email: hsbang@bgsu.edu, Office Phone: (419) 494-8223

Thanks for your attention and consideration!

APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT



B O W L I N G G R E E N S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y

School of Educational Foundations, Leadership
and Policy

**INFORMED PARTICIPANT’S CONSENT FOR Higher education as a tool for
identity building and self-empowerment for Nigerian females”**

Key Information

This study is about exploring female Nigerian’s higher education experiences for building identity and empowering self OR Higher education as a tool for identity building and self-empowerment for Nigerian females. You will participate in the interview of open-ended questions relating to your challenges as a Nigerian female and how higher education has helped you build your identity. The entire process will take only about an hour. Participating in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study any time you want.

Please note that the risks are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to explore female Nigerian’s higher education experiences for building identity and empowering self. This study is important because, despite the challenges that the sociocultural barriers placed on Nigerian

females, some can navigate through these challenges and can carve a niche for themselves as successful individuals.

PROCEDURE:

Upon your consent, you will participate in the interview about your experience as a Nigerian female and how education has helped in building your identity. You will talk briefly also about your basic information like age, education level, marital status and profession for no more than 10 minutes. The interview will take no more than 50 minutes. The entire process will take only about an hour of your time. The interview will be held online, and if need be, I may contact you for a follow-up, proofread or re-read the interview transcript for clarification. This follow-up I hope may be 20-30 minutes long but I will notify you prior to the follow-up.

VOLUNTARY NATURE:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time without explanation or penalty. Your decision of whether to participate will not influence your future relations with the researcher or Bowling Green State University.

CONFIDENTIALITY PROTECTION:

I, the researcher will determine the identities of the participants as numbers and will not reveal their identities. The information you provide me (soft copies) will be stored electronically on

School of Educational Foundations, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403-0246 fax 419-372-8265

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IRBNet ID # 1629766

EFFECTIVE 08/28/2020

EXPIRES 07/26/2021

the password-protected computer of the principal investigator. No name will be connected to the data. No one other than the researcher will have any access to the information. All hardcopy documents (consent, and interview transcripts hard copies) received from the participants will be stored in the cabinet in the room of 570 in Education building at Bowling Green State University. This is the department office for the department's graduate/research assistant and each graduate student/ research assistant have their personal safe cabinet for storage. This is also a locked room and each research assistant have their personal key to the room.

RISKS:

The risks associated with this study are not greater than those encountered in daily life. Fatigue is possible, given the length of the interview. In this case, participants are free to take a break.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have questions regarding the conduct of this study or about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State

University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 00-1-419-372-7716

(orc@bgsu.edu)

You can also contact me or my supervisor if you have any questions about the study.

- Yetunde S. Alabede (Graduate Student, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, Bowling Green State University), Email: yalabed@bgsu.edu, 910-364-4064
- Dr. Hyeyoung Bang, Ph.D. (Advisor/ Supervisor) Associate Professor, Educational Foundations, Leadership and Policy, Bowling Green State University, Email: hbang@bgsu.edu, Office Phone: (419) 372-4251

Agreement

“I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study. I also have been informed that all information I provide is strictly confidential and will be used for this study’s purpose only. I also have been informed that my identity/information/responses will be confidential throughout this study. I am free to discontinue participation during data collection at any time. My agreement to participate in this study is signified by my saying “yes” to the question: “Do you agree to participate in this study?” and my participation. Thank you for your time”

APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL

BGSU IRB - APPROVED FOR USE

IRBNet ID # 1629766EFFECTIVE 08/28/2020

DATE: August 31, 2020

TO: Yetunde Alabede

FROM: Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [1629766-3] Exploring female Nigerian's higher education experiences for building identity and empowering self

SUBMISSION Revision

TYPE:

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: August 28, 2020

EXPIRATION July 26, 2021

DATE:

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW

Expedited review category # 7

CATEGORY:

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the IRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on July 26, 2021. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation

for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or orc@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Institutional Review Board's records.