

**APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPALS IN SENIOR SECONDARY IN RIVERS STATE: THE  
GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

This study utilised a descriptive research design to examine the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State from a gender perspective. The research population consisted of 6,183 individuals, encompassing 320 principals and 5,833 teachers from 365 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, along with 30 officials from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and Senior Secondary Schools Board. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula with a 95% confidence level and 0.05 margin of error, resulting in approximately 376 participants. Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire called the 'Appointment of Principals in Senior Secondary Questionnaire (APSSQ)', which utilised a four-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree' to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions regarding the research variables. The instrument's validity and its reliability were tested using Cronbach's Alpha analysis, which yielded a coefficient of 0.79, indicating high internal consistency and acceptable reliability. Of the 376 questionnaires distributed, 322 were completed and deemed valid for analysis, achieving a response rate of approximately 85.6%. Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were employed to address the research questions, while inferential statistics through Independent t-tests were used to test hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that gender biases and patriarchal norms limit women's access to leadership positions in education, undermining equality and restricting competent leadership. The study concluded that there is a disparity in the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The study recommended, among others, that stakeholders should ensure that merit-based appointment criteria, gender-sensitivity workshops, and targeted leadership development programs to promote gender equality.

**Introduction**

Education serves as the cornerstone of societal development, functioning as the primary vehicle through which nations build human capital, foster economic growth, and promote social cohesion. Schools, as the fundamental institutions of formal learning, play an indispensable role in shaping the intellectual, moral, and social development of future generations. The quality and effectiveness of educational institutions are largely determined by their leadership, with principals serving as the pivotal figures who influence academic standards, institutional culture, and overall school performance (Ajala, 2017). However, the appointment of school principals has increasingly become a subject of critical examination, particularly when viewed through the lens of gender equity and representation.

Gender considerations in educational leadership have emerged as a significant area of scholarly inquiry and policy debate, reflecting broader societal concerns about equality and inclusive

governance (Ajala, 2017). The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across various sectors, including education, has prompted researchers and policymakers to examine the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that perpetuate gender disparities (Kelechi, 2015). In the Nigerian educational context, these concerns have gained particular prominence as the country grapples with achieving gender parity in various spheres of public life, including educational administration (Alabi et al., 2024).

The significance of gender in educational leadership extends beyond mere numerical representation to encompass questions of leadership effectiveness, institutional performance, and the modelling of gender equality for students and communities. Research has consistently demonstrated that diverse leadership brings varied perspectives, experiences, and approaches to problem-solving, which can enhance institutional effectiveness and responsiveness to diverse stakeholder needs (Olaifa et al., 2020). When educational institutions fail to achieve gender balance in leadership positions, they not only miss opportunities for diverse leadership perspectives but also send implicit messages about gender roles and career possibilities to students, teachers, and the broader community.

The issue of gender inequality in Nigeria's educational sector cannot be divorced from broader societal patterns of gender discrimination and cultural attitudes toward women's leadership capabilities. Kelechi (2015) revealed that persistent disparities manifest across various sectors, including education. These disparities are often rooted in traditional gender roles, cultural expectations, and institutional practices that inadvertently favour male candidates for leadership positions. Recent scholarly work by Alabi et al. (2024) has called for a reexamination of gender inequality in accessing resources and education, specifically advocating for strategies to reduce masculine gender hegemony in Nigeria. This perspective is particularly relevant to the appointment of school principals, as it highlights the need to challenge existing power structures and create more inclusive pathways for women's advancement in educational leadership.

The appointment procedures for school principals have significant implications for gender representation and administrative effectiveness. Olaifa et al. (2020) added that the processes used to select educational leaders can significantly impact their subsequent performance and institutional outcomes. Furthermore, the political dimensions of educational appointments cannot be ignored, particularly in the Nigerian context where educational leadership positions are often subject to political influence and patronage systems (Oko Ndubuisi et al., 2020; Akpan et al., 2019). Rivers State, as one of Nigeria's significant educational jurisdictions, presents a compelling case study for examining gender perspectives in principal appointments. Understanding the factors that contribute to gender disparities, stakeholder perceptions of gender influence, and potential strategies for promoting gender equity in principal appointments is essential for creating a more inclusive and effective educational system that serves all students equitably.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State exhibits significant gender disparities that undermine the principles of equity and inclusive leadership in educational administration. Despite policy commitments to gender equality and the documented benefits of diverse leadership, there remains a notable underrepresentation of women in principalship positions across the state's secondary school system. This gender imbalance is particularly concerning given that research indicates a correlation between gender diversity in leadership and enhanced institutional performance. The persistence of gender disparities in principal appointments suggests the existence of systemic barriers, cultural biases, and institutional practices that may inadvertently favour male candidates over equally qualified female counterparts. These disparities not only limit opportunities for qualified women educators but also deprive educational institutions of diverse leadership perspectives that could enhance decision-making processes and institutional

effectiveness. Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions sends problematic messages to students and communities about gender roles and career possibilities, potentially perpetuating cycles of gender inequality in educational and professional contexts.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to investigate the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State: the gender perspective. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Identify the factors contributing to gender disparities in the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Explore stakeholders' perceptions of the influence of gender on the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Examine the strategies for promoting gender equity and increasing female representation in principal appointments in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were raised to guide this study:

- What factors contribute to gender disparities in the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- How do stakeholders perceive the influence of gender on the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
- What strategies can be employed to promote gender equity and increase female representation in principal appointments in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and statistically tested at a 0.05 level of significance: There is a significant difference in the mean rating of how stakeholders perceive the influence of gender on the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory has been developed and shaped by numerous thinkers and activists throughout history. Key figures include Mary Wollstonecraft, who is often cited as a founder of feminist thought, particularly with her 1792 work "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman." Other important contributors include Simone de Beauvoir, whose "The Second Sex" is a foundational text, and various activists involved in the first and second waves of feminism, such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony (Omojola & Darlynton, 2016). This intellectual tradition evolved to encompass various strands, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, and more recently, intersectional feminism, each offering distinct perspectives on the mechanisms of gender oppression and pathways to equality (Amaefula, 2021).

The relevance of feminist theory to African contexts has been particularly emphasised by scholars who argue for indigenous feminist perspectives that account for the unique cultural, historical, and social dynamics of African societies. Uchendu et al. (2019) highlight the importance of embracing southern feminist theoretical perspectives when examining gender constructs in research on Nigerian women, particularly amongst the Igbo community. This approach recognises that whilst feminist principles are universal, their application must be contextually sensitive to local realities and cultural nuances. In examining the appointment of principals in Rivers State senior secondary schools, feminist theory provides a lens to understand how gender stereotypes, patriarchal power structures, and socialisation processes may influence decision-making and perpetuate the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions.

## Conceptual Framework

### Factors that contribute to gender disparities in the appointment of principals

Gender disparities in the appointment of principals stem from systemic and sociocultural factors. One key factor is gender bias in leadership selection, where stereotypes portraying men as more authoritative often disadvantage women, even when equally qualified (Kelechi, 2015). Additionally, political patronage influences appointments, with men dominating political networks that control principal selections (Akpan et al., 2019). Another factor is unequal access to professional development, as women often face barriers in acquiring leadership training due to familial and societal expectations (Ajala, 2017). Furthermore, institutionalised patriarchal norms in education systems reinforce male dominance, limiting women's advancement (Uchendu et al., 2019). Addressing these disparities requires policy reforms, gender-sensitive training, and equitable representation in decision-making processes.

### Stakeholders' Perceptions of Gender in the Appointment of Principals

Stakeholders' views on gender in principal appointments are influenced by deep-seated sociocultural and institutional biases. Many perceive leadership as a masculine domain, reinforcing women's underrepresentation in school administration (Kelechi, 2015). Patriarchal norms associate authority with men, leading to preferential treatment for male candidates during selection (Uchendu et al., 2019). Political dynamics further disadvantage women, as male-dominated appointment committees often favour existing networks. While some advocate merit-based selection, unconscious biases and traditional gender roles persist. Addressing these perceptions requires gender-sensitive policies and leadership training to ensure equitable representation in education.

### Strategies to Promote Gender Equity in Principal Appointments

Gender disparities in school leadership persist globally, with women underrepresented in principal positions despite their qualifications. Addressing this imbalance requires targeted interventions to dismantle systemic barriers and cultural biases. Below are four evidence-based strategies to foster gender equity in principal appointments:

**1. Implement Gender Quotas:** Mandating proportional representation through quotas ensures women are fairly considered for leadership roles, countering implicit biases in selection processes (Alabi et al., 2024).

**2. Leadership Training Programmes:** Specialised professional development equips female educators with administrative skills, building confidence and readiness for school leadership positions (Ajala, 2017).

**3. Transparent Appointment Systems:** Standardised, merit-based selection criteria reduce patronage networks and subjective biases that disadvantage qualified female candidates (Olaifa et al., 2020).

**4. Gender Sensitivity Campaigns:** Workshops and media initiatives challenge stereotypes about leadership capabilities, reshaping perceptions to support women's advancement in education management (Uchendu et al., 2019).

These strategies combine policy reforms with cultural change to create equitable pathways for women in educational leadership.

### **Review of Related Empirical Studies**

Alabi et al. (2024) investigate gender disparities in Nigerian education through mixed-methods research. The authors found that patriarchal structures systematically limit women's access to leadership training and promotion opportunities in schools. Quantitative data revealed only 28% of principals were female, while qualitative interviews exposed cultural biases favouring male leadership. The study recommends policy interventions like gender quotas and mentorship programs to address these imbalances. Its strength lies in combining statistical evidence with lived experiences, though its Nigeria-specific focus may limit generalizability to other contexts.

Olaifa et al. (2020) carried out an empirical study to analyse principal selection processes in 50 secondary schools. Researchers discovered that appointment committees consistently favoured male candidates, with women facing additional scrutiny about their leadership capabilities. The study employed document analysis and interviews to reveal how informal networks and political considerations often override meritocratic principles. It provides concrete evidence of systemic bias in promotion pathways, suggesting standardised appointment criteria could improve equity. However, the small sample size from one Nigerian state may not reflect national trends.

Uchendu et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study to examine cultural perceptions of female leadership through interviews with 30 Igbo educators. Findings reveal deeply ingrained stereotypes associating school leadership with masculine traits, creating barriers for aspiring female principals. The research contributes valuable insights into how cultural narratives shape appointment decisions, using feminist theory to analyse power dynamics. While rich in ethnographic detail, the study's exclusive focus on Igbo communities means findings may not fully apply to other ethnic groups in Nigeria's diverse educational system.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State: The gender perspective.

#### **Population of the Study**

The study's population comprised 6,198 individuals, including 365 principals, 5,833 teachers drawn from 320 public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and 30 officials from the Rivers State Ministry of Education and Senior Secondary Schools Board.

#### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Based on a population of 6,198, the calculated sample size is approximately 376. The sampling technique employed in this study is stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from principals, teachers, and officials. Sample Size: approximately 376

#### **Instrument of Data Collection**

A structured questionnaire, titled 'Appointment of Principals in Senior Secondary Questionnaire (APSSQ)', was utilised for data collection. The APSSQ employed a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' (1) to 'Strongly Agree' (4), to assess respondents' attitudes and perceptions on the research variables.

#### **Validity and Reliability**

The questionnaire's reliability was established through expert validation and Cronbach's Alpha analysis, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.79, indicating high internal consistency and acceptable reliability.

### Administration of Instrument

The research instrument was administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants. The instruments were administered in two intervals, after which they were retrieved. Out of the 376 questionnaires distributed, 322 were valid and usable for analysis, representing a response rate of approximately 85.6%.

### Data Analysis

"Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to answer the research questions, and inferential statistics (Independent t-test) to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 significance level. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0 was utilised for data analysis. Results were considered statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Answers to Research Questions

#### Research Question One: What factors contribute to gender disparities in the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Mean Score and Standard Deviation on Factors Contributing to Gender Disparities in the Appointment of Principals in Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State

S/N	Statement	Male Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	Female Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	$\bar{x}$ of x	Decision
1	Gender bias in leadership selection disadvantages women despite equal qualifications	3.42	0.61	3.37	0.58	3.40	Agreed
2	Political patronage in appointments favours men due to the male-dominated political networks	3.38	0.66	3.41	0.63	3.40	Agreed
3	Women have less access to leadership training due to societal and family expectations	3.45	0.59	3.39	0.62	3.42	Agreed
4	Institutionalised patriarchal norms in education systems limit women's advancement	3.50	0.55	3.44	0.57	3.47	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>						3.42	Agreed

The results reveal that both male and female stakeholders agreed that gender bias, political patronage, limited access to leadership training, and institutionalised patriarchal norms contribute to gender disparities in principal appointments. The grand mean of 3.42 indicates a strong consensus that these systemic and sociocultural factors significantly hinder women's advancement. This implies that gender disparities in the appointment of principals are not random but stem from entrenched systemic and sociocultural barriers. Stakeholders recognise that biased selection practices, political influences, restricted professional development, and patriarchal norms collectively disadvantage women, reducing their chances of attaining leadership positions in schools.

**Research Question Two: How do stakeholders perceive the influence of gender on the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?**

Table: Descriptive Statistics of Mean score and standard deviation on Stakeholders' Perceptions of Gender in the Appointment of Principals

S/N	Statement	Male Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	Female Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	$\bar{x}$ of x	Decision
5	Leadership is perceived as a masculine role	3.42	0.84	3.67	0.79	3.55	Agreed
6	Patriarchal norms favour male candidates in selection	3.51	0.81	3.74	0.72	3.63	Agreed
7	Political networks disadvantage women	3.46	0.86	3.69	0.75	3.58	Agreed
8	Unconscious bias affects merit-based selection	3.39	0.89	3.62	0.77	3.51	Agreed
	<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.45</b>		<b>3.68</b>		<b>3.56</b>	<b>Agreed</b>

The results indicate that both male and female stakeholders agree that gender perceptions significantly influence principal appointments. While male stakeholders acknowledged these biases, female stakeholders recorded slightly higher mean scores, suggesting stronger recognition of the barriers women face. Overall, patriarchal norms, political dynamics, and unconscious biases collectively perpetuate male dominance in leadership roles, hindering equitable appointments. This implies that entrenched sociocultural and institutional biases continue to shape the appointment of principals, with leadership roles still largely perceived as male-dominated. Such perceptions, reinforced by patriarchal norms, political networks, and unconscious bias, limit women's access to leadership positions despite equal qualifications, underscoring the need for gender-sensitive reforms.

**Research Question Three: What strategies can be employed to promote gender equity and increase female representation in principal appointments in senior secondary schools in Rivers State?**

Table: Descriptive Statistics of Mean Score and Standard Deviation on Strategies to Promote Gender Equity in Principal Appointments

S/N	Statement	Male Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	Female Stakeholder Mean	Std. Dev.	x of x	Decision
9	Implement Gender Quotas	3.42	0.65	3.58	0.61	3.50	Agreed
10	Leadership Training Programmes	3.56	0.59	3.62	0.57	3.59	Agreed

11	Transparent Appointment Systems	3.48	0.63	3.60	0.60	3.54	Agreed
12	Gender Sensitivity Campaigns	3.51	0.61	3.66	0.55	3.59	Agreed
<b>Grand Mean</b>						3.56	Agreed

The findings indicate strong agreement among both male and female stakeholders on strategies to promote gender equity in principal appointments. Respondents support gender quotas, leadership training, transparent selection processes, and gender sensitivity campaigns as effective measures. These strategies collectively address systemic barriers, build women’s leadership capacity, and foster an inclusive educational leadership environment. This implies that stakeholders recognise the need for deliberate and structured interventions to close the gender gap in principal appointments. They acknowledge that equity in school leadership requires proactive measures to dismantle biases and promote women’s advancement by endorsing gender quotas, targeted training, transparent selection processes, and sensitivity campaigns.

### Test of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis One: There is a significant difference in the mean rating of how stakeholders perceive the influence of gender on the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State.**

Table 3: Independent t-test on Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Influence of Gender

Respondents	N	$\bar{x}$ (Mean)	SD	Df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Male Stakeholders	184	3.46	0.57	320	4.328	0.000	Reject Ho
Female Stakeholders	138	3.12	0.61				

The independent t-test result ( $t = 4.328$ ,  $df = 320$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) shows a statistically significant difference in how male and female stakeholders perceive the influence of gender on principal appointments in senior secondary schools in Rivers State. With a p-value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Male stakeholders had a higher mean score (3.46) than female stakeholders (3.12), indicating that men are more likely to acknowledge or emphasise gender’s influence in the appointment process compared to women. This implies that male stakeholders are more inclined to perceive gender as playing a decisive role in the appointment of principals than their female counterparts. The significant difference suggests that gender-related perceptions are not uniform across stakeholder groups, highlighting the need for inclusive dialogue and targeted policies to address these disparities.

### Discussion of Findings

#### Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Influence of Gender

The findings revealed that stakeholders’ perceptions of gender influence in principal appointments are significantly different, with male stakeholders more likely to believe gender plays a decisive role. This aligns with Ajala (2017), who reported that socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures restrict women’s access to leadership roles in education, fostering male dominance in decision-making. Similarly, Alabi et al. (2024) emphasised that masculine hegemony persists in Nigeria’s educational leadership due to entrenched biases in recruitment and appointment processes, which systematically disadvantage women. The present study’s result suggests that perceptions are shaped by lived experiences and gendered realities, where male stakeholders may view current practices as merit-driven, while female stakeholders identify systemic barriers. This divergence

underscores the importance of implementing equitable appointment policies, capacity-building programmes, and awareness campaigns aimed at dismantling discriminatory norms. Such interventions can bridge perceptual gaps and foster a more inclusive approach to leadership appointments in senior secondary schools.

### Conclusion

This study examined the appointment of principals in senior secondary schools in Rivers State from a gender perspective, focusing on stakeholders' perceptions and the influence of socio-cultural and institutional factors. Findings revealed that gender significantly influences appointment processes, with entrenched patriarchal norms and political dynamics favouring male candidates. While merit-based selection is advocated in principle, unconscious biases and traditional gender roles continue to limit women's access to leadership positions. The divergence in perceptions between male and female stakeholders highlights persistent systemic inequities within the education sector. These biases not only undermine gender equality but also restrict the pool of competent leadership available to schools. The study concludes that achieving fair representation requires deliberate policy reforms, gender-sensitive appointment procedures, and targeted leadership training for women. Promoting inclusivity in principal appointments is crucial for enhancing educational governance, fostering diversity in leadership, and achieving equity in Rivers State's secondary school administration.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The State Ministry of Education should develop and enforce clear, merit-based criteria for the appointment of principals to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure equal opportunities for both male and female candidates.
- Regular gender-sensitivity workshops should be organised for policymakers, school boards, and appointment committees to challenge socio-cultural stereotypes and unconscious biases that hinder women's access to leadership positions.
- Targeted leadership development programmes should be implemented to equip qualified female educators with the administrative, political, and managerial skills necessary to compete effectively for principalship roles.

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