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**The Impact of Gender Disparities in Enrollment on the academic performance of female Students in Rivers State University**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined The Impact of Gender Disparities in Enrollment on the academic performance of female Students in Rivers State University. To achieve the purpose of the study, the researcher developed three objectives of the study, three research questions and three hypotheses that guided the conduct of the study. The research design used for the study was a descriptive survey design. The population comprised 204 female students in Faculty of Education, Rivers State University. The study made use of census method of sampling where all the population size was used for sampling. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire titled Gender Disparities in Enrollment and Academic Performance Questionnaire (GDEAPQ). The instrument was arranged using a 4-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation at Faculty of Education, Rivers State University reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Using Cronbach's Alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, applying a criterion mean of 2.50 for interpretation. The null hypotheses were tested using t-test transformation at 0.05 level of significant. Based on the data analysis, the finding of the study revealed that STEM & Technical fields, socio-cultural factors and economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University. Based on the findings, the study recommends that: Universities should implement targeted mentorship and role-model programmes that connect female students with successful women in STEM and technical careers to boost interest, confidence, and persistence, school authorities should strengthen counselling and psychosocial support services to address issues such as gender bias, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and family expectations and government and university management should expand scholarships, bursaries, and fee-waiver schemes targeted at economically disadvantaged female students

**Keywords:** gender disparities, enrollment, academic performance, female students

**INTRODUCTION**

Gender disparities at Rivers State University (RSU) and other Nigerian universities show males often dominate enrollment in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and technical courses, influenced by cultural norms, patriarchy, poverty, and gender stereotyping. While overall female enrollment is increasing, persistent challenges like sexual harassment, lack of role models, biased counseling, and household duties often hinder female performance and participation in certain programs, leading to gender gaps in achievement despite efforts for equity. Gender disparities in universities continue to attract considerable scholarly and policy attention across the globe because of their implications for social justice, economic development, and the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality (UNESCO, 2021). Although significant progress has been recorded in reducing gender gaps in access to basic and secondary education in many countries, tertiary education remains an arena where gender differences in enrollment and academic performance are evident (World

Bank, 2020). In Nigeria, and specifically in Rivers State, these disparities pose a critical challenge to human capital development and the realization of national development goals (Federal Ministry of Education [FME], 2022).

Nigeria's tertiary education sector includes universities, polytechnics and colleges of education, play significant role in preparing skilled manpower for socio-economic transformation. Yet gender imbalance in both access and outcomes persists despite several policy interventions, such as the National Policy on Education and gender mainstreaming strategies (Okeke, 2020). Historically, socio-cultural norms and patriarchal structures have constrained women's participation in university, relegating them to traditional gender roles and limiting their career prospects (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). In Rivers State, a region with considerable oil wealth and industrial activity, the persistence of gender gaps in tertiary institutions underscores the complexity of the problem: economic prosperity has not automatically translated into equitable educational outcomes. Globally, gender disparities in tertiary education vary by region. In some high-income countries, women now outnumber men in university enrollment; however, women continue to be underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and in senior academic positions (UNESCO, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, the situation is more pronounced, while female enrollment in university has increased, structural inequalities and socio-economic barriers continue to hinder parity (World Bank, 2020). Nigeria mirrors these continental trends. According to the National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022), female students constitute slightly less than half of total enrollments, and significant disparities persist across disciplines, particularly in STEM fields and professional programs. Moreover, performance gaps often reflect entrenched gender norms and unequal resource allocation (Okeke, 2020).

Gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance are multifaceted. Socio-cultural factors, including early marriage, parental expectations, and gendered socialization, frequently discourage girls from pursuing university or sustaining high academic performance (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). Economic factors are equally significant: poverty and limited family resources often compel parents to prioritize the education of male children, viewing female education as a less rewarding investment (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Institutional factors such as inadequate campus security, absence of gender-sensitive policies, and lack of female role models in academia also contribute to the persistence of disparities (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). In Rivers State, where oil wealth coexists with pockets of poverty, these determinants intersect in complex ways, creating a dynamic that requires context-specific analysis. Empirical evidence shows that despite improvements in female enrollment over the past two decades, Rivers State University continue to record gender gaps, especially in technical and engineering programs (Rivers State Ministry of Education, 2023). Social perceptions that certain courses or professions are more suitable for men limit the aspirations of female students and contribute to the persistence of male dominance in these fields. Additionally, issues such as inadequate scholarship schemes for female students, gender-biased admission practices, and the influence of traditional cultural expectations perpetuate these gaps (Okeke, 2020).

Academic performance disparities are not merely a reflection of enrollment gaps; they also indicate deeper systemic inequalities. Studies in Nigerian universities reveal that female students often outperform their male counterparts in some disciplines but encounter structural barriers like gender bias from lecturers, limited mentorship opportunities, and harassment that undermine their academic experience (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). In some cases, household responsibilities and societal expectations impose additional burdens on female students, affecting their capacity to sustain high academic achievement (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Socio-Cultural Factors: Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, early marriage expectations, and societal pressure for women to prioritize domestic roles significantly reduce female enrollment and retention in university. In rural and riverine communities, parents may be reluctant to invest in long years of tertiary schooling for daughters, fearing that marriage or childcare responsibilities will eventually interrupt or "waste" that investment. Such attitudes discourage female students from pursuing university or prompt them to select programs perceived as more compatible with gendered expectations, such as education or nursing, rather than engineering or technology. (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). Also the male children as future family breadwinners, Economic inequality plays a pivotal role in shaping gender disparities in university. Households with limited income frequently allocate scarce resources to educate male children, perceiving them as future breadwinners (Ogunyemi & Adebayo, 2019). This pattern is particularly pronounced in low-income and

rural communities of Rivers State, where education is often seen as a means of securing economic mobility. The high cost of tertiary education covering tuition, accommodation, and learning materials exacerbates the disadvantage faced by female students from economically marginalized families (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, economic disparities influence, access, persist and perform: students from poorer households are more likely to combine schooling with income-generating activities, which can compromise academic outcomes (UNESCO, 2021).

The Concept of Gender disparity in enrollment rates remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria's tertiary education sector, and Rivers State provides a striking case study of how socio-cultural, economic, and institutional dynamics intersect to produce uneven access to university. Despite being one of the country's most economically vibrant states thanks largely to oil and gas activities Rivers State still struggles to achieve parity between male and female students in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. National enrollment statistics reveal a long-standing gender imbalance in Nigerian university. The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2022) reported that female students constitute slightly less than half of total enrollment nationally, with notable disparities across disciplines and regions. Local data from the Rivers State Ministry of Education (RSME, 2023) suggest similar patterns: female students are relatively well represented in social sciences, education, and health sciences, but remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and in professional programs such as engineering, maritime studies, and technical education. The gender gap is particularly pronounced in public polytechnics and technical colleges, where cultural stereotypes often portray these fields as male domains (Okeke, 2020).

Several socio-cultural factors continue to shape these enrollment patterns. Economic disparities compound these cultural influences. Although Rivers State generates significant national revenue, income distribution is uneven, and poverty rates remain high in some rural and semi-urban areas. For households with scarce resources, the cost of tertiary education like tuition, accommodation, books, and transportation can be prohibitive. Families often choose to educate male children first, viewing them as better positioned to secure lucrative employment (Adedeji & Olanrewaju, 2018). Female students from low-income families are therefore more likely to delay enrollment, attend less expensive institutions, or drop out altogether. These economic constraints contribute significantly to the persistent gender gap. The underrepresentation of female students in Rivers State University has far-reaching implications. It limits the pool of trained women professionals, particularly in high-demand (STEM sectors), thereby constraining the state's human capital development and economic diversification. It also perpetuates gender wage gaps and limits women's participation in leadership positions across industries. More broadly, persistent gender disparity undermines Nigeria's commitments to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and Goal 5 on gender equality (UNESCO, 2021).

Households in Rivers State, particularly those outside the oil economy, are vulnerable to economic shocks such as fluctuations in commodity prices or environmental disruptions from oil spills and flooding. When family income falls unexpectedly, it is often the girl child whose schooling is interrupted first. Early withdrawal of girls from tertiary education either to save money or to enter marriage deepens the gender gap and reduces women's long-term earning potential (World Bank, 2020). While government and private scholarship programs exist, many are competitive and sometimes skewed toward disciplines where men predominate, such as engineering and technology (Okeke, 2020). Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are doubly disadvantaged: they are less able to afford tertiary education on their own and less likely to access financial support tailored to their circumstances. Inadequate gender-responsive financial aid policies thus perpetuate enrollment and completion gaps.

Economic hardship affects not only enrollment but also persistence and performance. Female students from poor households often engage in part-time employment to finance their studies, leaving less time for academic work. Others may live in substandard accommodation or face food insecurity, both of which impair concentration and health. These conditions contribute to lower grades and higher dropout rates of economically disadvantaged women (Oviawe & Okonkwo, 2021). Some of the impact on enrollment and performance on academic of female Students in Rivers State University includes: Lower Enrollment: Cultural norms reduce the perceived value of educating girls, leading to fewer girls entering school. Higher Dropout Rates: Domestic duties, early marriage, and negative attitudes push girls out of school prematurely. Performance Gaps: Unequal resource allocation, lack of

support, and internalized biases can depress girls' academic performance, creating disparities. Discipline Segregation: Girls are often steered away from male-dominated fields like Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Gender equity in university remains a critical issue globally and within Nigeria's university system. Universities are expected to provide equal opportunities for admission, participation, and academic success for all students, regardless of gender. However, emerging trends in tertiary institutions suggest the existence of gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance, which may limit equal access to education and undermine human capital development. At Rivers State University, concerns persist regarding uneven enrollment patterns across faculties and programmes, as well as differences in academic outcomes between male and female students.

Observations and institutional records indicate that certain disciplines tend to be male-dominated while others attract more female students, reflecting deep-rooted socio-cultural norms, gender stereotypes, parental expectations, and career socialization. These enrollment imbalances may translate into unequal learning experiences, access to resources, mentoring opportunities, and academic support. In addition, disparities in academic performance measured through grades, retention rates, progression, and completion have been reported in some programmes, raising questions about whether gender-related factors such as learning environment, teaching practices, confidence levels, workload distribution, and support systems differentially affect students. Despite policy commitments to gender equality in education, there is limited empirical evidence that systematically examines the extent and nature of gender disparities in both enrollment and academic performance within Rivers State University. Without robust data and analysis, it is difficult for university management, policymakers, and educators to identify the underlying causes of these disparities or to design targeted interventions that promote inclusivity and academic equity. Therefore, the problem of this study is the lack of comprehensive empirical understanding of disparities in enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. Addressing this gap is essential for informing evidence-based policies, improving institutional practices, and ensuring that all students, male and female have equitable opportunities to enroll, succeed academically, and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. Specifically, the study sought to attain the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent to which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university
2. To ascertain the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university
3. To find out the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?
2. To what extent do socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?
3. To what extent do economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?

### **Hypotheses**

The researcher formulated the following null hypotheses that guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to

which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university.

2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State university

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for examining the current implementation of educational policies relating to gender disparity in the university. Descriptive survey allows the researcher to gather data from a large sample and describe the characteristics of the population as they exist at the time of the study, without manipulating any independent variables. The population comprised 204 female students in Faculty of Education, Rivers State University. The study made use of census method of sampling where all the population size was used for sampling. Data were collected using a self-designed questionnaire titled Gender Disparities in Enrollment and Academic Performance Questionnaire (GDEAPQ). The instrument was arranged using a 4-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation at Faculty of Education, Rivers State University reviewed the instrument for face and content validity. Using Cronbach's Alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, applying a criterion mean of 2.50 for interpretation. The null hypotheses were tested using t-test transformation at 0.05 level of significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the extent STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University**

S/No	Item	Female Students N = 204		
		Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Female students constitute slightly less than half of total enrollment nationally, with notable disparities across STEM disciplines	3.11	0.87	High Extent
2.	Female students remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics	3.01	0.82	High Extent
3.	Female students are not many in professional programs such as engineering, maritime studies, and technical education	3.20	0.89	High Extent
4.	The gender gap is particularly pronounced in universities where cultural stereotypes often portray these fields as male domains	3.04	0.82	High Extent
5.	Female students in most cases do not do well in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics	3.01	0.82	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean Score</b>		<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.88</b>	

**Source:** Field Data 2025

Table 1 presents that items 1 to 5 have means of 3.11, 3.01, 3.20, 3.04, 3.01 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.87 to 0.82 which indicate “High Extent” on the extent STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. Also, the grand means for female students are 3.07 and 0.88 for standard deviation respectively, further confirming a “High Extent” on the extent STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. However, it was found that increase in STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University to a high extent.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the extent socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University**

S/No	Item	Female Students N = 204		
		Mean	SD	Mean
6.	Societies often view boys as future breadwinners, making them prioritized for education, while girls are expected to focus on domestic duties	3.20	0.89	High Extent
7	Some interpretations of religious or traditional beliefs discourage female education or promote practices that negatively impact girls' health and schooling.	3.12	0.87	High Extent
8.	Cultural norms reduce the perceived value of educating girls, leading to fewer girls entering school	3.17	0.89	High Extent
9.	Domestic duties, early marriage, and negative attitudes push girls out of school prematurely	3.01	0.82	High Extent
10.	Girls are often steered away from male-dominated fields like Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics	3.11	0.87	High Extent
<b>Grand Mean Score</b>		<b>3.12</b>	<b>0.88</b>	

**Source:** Field Data 2025

Table 2 presents that items 6 to 10 have means of 3.20, 3.12, 3.17, 3.01, 3.11 for female students with standard deviations ranging from 0.89 to 0.87 which indicate “High Extent” on the extent socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. Also, the grand means for female students are 3.12 and 0.88 for standard deviation respectively, further confirming a “High Extent” on the extent socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. However, it was found that socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University to a high extent.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University?

**Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of the extent economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University**

S/No	Item	Female Students N = 204		
		Mean	SD	Remark
11.	Economic inequality plays a pivotal role in	3.11	0.87	High Extent

	shaping gender disparities in university.			
12.	Family with limited income frequently allocate scarce resources to educate male children	3.01	0.82	High Extent
13.	Students from poorer households are more likely to combine schooling with income-generating activities, which can compromise academic outcomes	3.20	0.89	High Extent
14.	Families often choose to educate male children first, viewing them as better positioned to secure lucrative employment	3.04	0.82	High Extent
15.	Female students from low-income families are therefore more likely to delay enrollment, attend less expensive institutions, or drop out altogether	3.01	0.82	High Extent
	<b>Grand Mean Score</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.88</b>	

Source: Field Data 2025

Table 3 presents that items 11 to 15 have means of 3.11, 3.01, 3.20, 3.04, 3.01 for female students with standard deviation ranging from 0.87 to 0.82 which indicate “High Extent” on the extent economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. Also, the grand means for female students are 3.07 and 0.88 for standard deviation respectively, further confirming a “High Extent” on the extent do economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University. However, it was found that economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University to a high extent.

### Test of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University.

**Table 4: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University**

	F	Sig.	T	Df	p-value	$\alpha$ -value	Decision
Equal variances assumed	1.085	.298	4.251	202	.107	.050	H <sub>0</sub> Not Rejected
Equal variances not assumed			4.251	796.709	.107	.050	

The information in table 4 shows that equal variances assumed has  $t = 4.251$ ,  $df = 202$ , and 2-tailed  $p = 0.107$ . Thus, the null hypothesis 1 that “there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University” is not rejected as  $t(202) = 4.251$ , 2-tailed  $p = 0.107 > \alpha = 0.05$ . This implies that respondents are in agreement that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University

**Table 5: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University**

	F	Sig.	T	Df	p-value	$\alpha$ -value	Decision
Equal variances assumed	15.599	.123	11.985	202	.097	.050	H <sub>0</sub> Not Rejected
Equal variances not assumed			11.985	781.568	.097	.050	

Table 5 presents that equal variances assumed has  $t = 11.985$ ,  $df = 202$ , and 2-tailed  $p = 0.097$ . Therefore the null hypothesis 2 that “there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University” is not rejected as  $t(202) = 11.985$ , 2-tailed  $p = 0.097 > \alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the respondents agreed that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University.

**Table 6: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University**

	F	Sig.	T	Df	p-value	$\alpha$ -value	Decision
Equal variances assumed	1.085	.298	4.251	202	.107	.050	H <sub>0</sub> Not Rejected
Equal variances not assumed			4.251	796.709	.107	.050	

The information in table 3 shows that equal variances assumed has  $t = 4.251$ ,  $df = 202$ , and 2-tailed  $p = 0.107$ . Thus, the null hypothesis 1 that “there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University” is not rejected as  $t(202) = 4.251$ , 2-tailed  $p = 0.107 > \alpha = 0.05$ . This implies that respondents are in agreement that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University.

### Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study in research question one: To what extent do STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University revealed that STEM & technical fields affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University to a large extent. This finding is in collaboration with Oviawe & Okonkwo (2021) who admitted that STEM & Technical Fields: Males generally outnumber females in STEM and technical programs due to cultural beliefs favoring male education, perceived difficulty/dirtiness of technical jobs, and lack of female role models in these areas. And that STEM means science, technology, engineering,

and mathematics is an umbrella term used to group together the related technical disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It represents a broad and interconnected set of fields that are crucial for innovation and technological advancement.

The study in Research Questions 2: To what extent do socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University indicated that socio-cultural factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University to a high extent. This study is in the same view with Martincin & Stead (2014) who asserts that Socio-cultural factors like patriarchal norms, early marriage, gendered expectations (boys as providers), and cultural beliefs often hinder girls' enrollment and performance by prioritizing boys' education, assigning girls more domestic work, and devaluing female education, while negative attitudes, lack of female role models, and harmful practices like FGM also create barriers, though some cultures support female empowerment through education. These norms clash with education, leading to lower attendance, higher dropouts, and less engagement in STEM fields, even as positive attitudes and policy changes can improve outcomes.

The findings of the study in Research Question 3: To what extent do economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University showed that economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University. The finding is in the same vein with Ogunyemi & Adebayo (2019) who reviewed that Economic inequality plays a pivotal role in shaping gender disparities in university. Households with limited income frequently allocate scarce resources to educate male children, perceiving them as future breadwinners. This pattern is particularly pronounced in low-income and rural communities of Rivers State, where education is often seen as a means of securing economic mobility. The high cost of tertiary education covering tuition, accommodation, and learning materials exacerbates the disadvantage faced by female students from economically marginalized families. Furthermore, economic disparities influence not only access but also persistence and performance: students from poorer households are more likely to combine schooling with income-generating activities, which can compromise academic outcomes

### **CONCLUSION**

Gender disparities in enrollment and academic performance of female students in Rivers State University cannot be over emphasized. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that STEM & technical fields, socio-cultural factors and economic factors affect the enrollment and academic performance among female students in Rivers State University. The study also deduced that gender disparity in enrollment rates remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria's education sector, and Rivers State University provides a striking case study of how technical fields, socio-cultural and economic intersect to produce uneven access to university. Despite being one of the country's most economically vibrant states thanks largely to oil and gas activities Rivers State still struggles to achieve parity between male and female students in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to ensure that the study meet its objectives.

1. Universities should implement targeted mentorship and role-model programmes that connect female students with successful women in STEM and technical careers to boost interest, confidence, and persistence.
2. School authorities should strengthen counselling and psychosocial support services to address issues such as gender bias, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and family expectations.
3. Government and university management should expand scholarships, bursaries, and fee-waiver schemes targeted at economically disadvantaged female students.

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