An Emphasis on the Nigerian Workplace: Reducing Implicit Gender Bias in the Career Promotion Process

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Abstract
The study emphasizes the value of gender equality and diversity in workplaces, highlighting the unique talents and skills both genders bring. Despite evidence showing that gender stereotypes can influence HR managers' recruitment decisions, leading to biases, gender diversity programs remain beneficial. Implicit biases, often unconscious, are more common than explicit ones, with women frequently being disadvantaged. While extensive research exists globally, few studies have examined gender discrimination within the Nigerian context. This study focuses on recruitment as part of the job promotion process in four Nigerian organizations, using secondary research to identify evidence of implicit gender bias in hiring practices. The findings reveal significant gender gaps in entry-level and senior management roles, attributed to factors such as gender-specific CV requirements, biased performance evaluation tools, insufficiently trained evaluators, and entrenched societal patriarchy. The study concludes that unconscious gender bias persists in Nigeria, disadvantaging women. To address this, it recommends measures such as implementing anonymous recruitment to conceal gender-sensitive identifiers, revising patriarchal societal norms, developing standardized performance evaluation criteria, and providing regular training for performance assessors to reduce bias during recruitment.

Introduction
1.1 Goal of the Research
In the hiring, promotion, and layoff procedures used in the workplace to advance employees, unconscious gender bias takes place. Examining unconscious gender prejudice in hiring Practices and offering solutions to address them in Nigerian workplaces is the primary goal of this research.

1.2 Purpose of the Research
In keeping with the aforementioned goal, the research aims to accomplish the following:
RO1: To investigate implicit gender discrimination in Nigerian workplaces.
ROC2: To investigate why the UK leads the world in 21st-century workplace gender discrimination claims.
RO3: To determine how implicit gender bias affects a company's ability to expand
RO4: To identify workable strategies for lowering gender discrimination in Nigeria's hiring practices.

1.3 Justification for Research
The growing business case for workplace diversity and gender equality highlights their importance in fostering organizational growth and competitiveness. Diverse teams are believed to provide broader perspectives and reduce biases that can arise in homogeneous groups (Azmat and Boring, 2020). Research by Mirza et al. (2012) on gender diversity's impact on economic performance in Pakistan supports these

claims. Similarly, studies like those by the ILO (2017) and Foley, Cooper, and Mosseri (2019) emphasize how gender discrimination hinders organizational expansion and innovation. In Nigeria, gender inequality is evident across various sectors, with women facing oppression, marginalization, and unequal representation in leadership and management positions (UN Women, 2020). For instance, Ikwumokoni and Ahmed (2017) revealed that in 2000, men dominated 75% of federal government service positions, leaving women with only 25% overall and 14% in management roles. Similar trends are seen in state parastatals and private enterprises (Gberevbie et al., 2014). This bias, rooted in societal norms and religious beliefs, continues to undermine meritocracy, workforce diversity, and organizational success, potentially contributing to broader societal issues like unemployment-driven vices.

Gender discrimination in recruitment and selection processes remains prevalent, with HR practices in Nigeria favoring men. Studies propose that anonymous recruitment practices could help mitigate bias by removing gender identifiers during evaluation. This research focuses on addressing such gender discrimination through the implementation of blind evaluation strategies, particularly within the Nigerian context.

1.4 Investigative Queries
The following inquiries will have responses from the completion research:

RQ1. Does Nigeria's hiring procedure discriminate against women?

RQ2. Given their propensity to discriminatorily hire people based solely on their gender, how can managers reinstate meritocracy as the standard by which prospective workers are judged?

RQ3. In what types of jobs in Nigeria might anonymous hiring be more effective in reducing gender discrimination?

RQ4. How can the bias against women in hiring be lessened?

1.5 Background and Importance of the Research Study
The development of a nation's social, political, and economic systems heavily relies on productive and financially successful businesses, which are shaped by the unique contributions of every employee, regardless of gender. Gender diversity is essential in the workplace, yet discrimination against women persists globally and in countries like Nigeria. Studies show that biases, whether conscious or unconscious, influence hiring practices, with women often being assigned low-status, low-paying roles that mirror traditional societal expectations. In Nigeria, these patterns are linked to entrenched patriarchal norms and colonial legacies, which continue to marginalize women in employment and education.

Research highlights the persistence of gender discrimination in recruitment and employment practices. Women are frequently discouraged from applying for roles with demanding requirements, such as long hours or travel, due to implicit biases. While some HR managers argue that certain positions necessitate gender considerations, applying such criteria broadly results in systematic discrimination against women, particularly career-minded individuals.

Efforts to combat gender bias in Nigeria have been insufficient. Global initiatives, such as the Women's Rights Protocol and the UN Declaration on Equal Rights, aim to address these disparities. However, local studies, such as those by Ikwumokoni and Ahmed (2017), fail to account for Nigeria's specific cultural and economic context or provide practical solutions to mitigate bias. Additionally, unconscious gender bias often goes unnoticed in hiring processes, reinforcing traditional stereotypes and limiting women's career advancement.

To address these issues, this research proposes an integrated framework to identify and mitigate implicit gender biases in Nigeria's workplace. It aims to:

• Identify subtle indicators of gender discrimination.

- Help organizations understand how socio-cultural and economic practices affect hiring decisions.
- Provide evidence-based strategies to reduce bias in hiring and promote gender equality.
- Serve as a benchmark for future research into workplace discrimination.

Literature Review
2.1 Introduction
The prevalence of gender discrimination in workplaces has gained global attention due to the increasing volume of scholarly publications on the subject. This chapter evaluates existing literature from sociology and business management fields, focusing on implicit gender biases in hiring practices, the theoretical foundations of workplace discrimination, the connection between gender and the "glass ceiling," and proposed mitigation strategies. The study aims to critically analyze the mechanisms and manifestations of gender discrimination in the workplace.

2.2 Bias Based on Gender When Hiring
Advancing gender equality is vital for fostering just and sustainable economies (EBRD, 2016). Despite constitutional provisions in Nigeria prohibiting gender discrimination, biases—both conscious and unconscious—persist in hiring and selection processes. Unconscious biases, particularly against women, remain pervasive and influence organizational success due to recruitment practices that prioritize factors other than merit.

Research demonstrates that gender bias often excludes women from high-status roles or narrows their opportunities (Gaddes et al., 2018). This study explores whether unconscious gender prejudice exists within Nigerian hiring practices and assesses its impact on the workforce.

2.3 Glass Ceilings and Gender in the Workplace
The "glass ceiling" limits women's progression to higher organizational levels, with men often favored for managerial roles. Studies from various professions—such as science, law, and bureaucracy—highlight this discrepancy (Herring, 2009; Zulqarnain et al., 2021). Diverse top management teams are proven to enhance organizational adaptability and creativity. However, patriarchal norms in Nigeria perpetuate these biases, restricting women's access to leadership positions. This study focuses on the interplay of hiring and management practices, emphasizing the barriers faced by women in achieving executive roles in developing economies like Nigeria.

2.4 Theoretical Foundation of Hiring Discrimination Based on Gender
Gender discrimination in the workplace has been analyzed through economic theories, including the statistical discrimination model (Arrow, 1973; Phelps, 1972) and Gary Becker's (1957) taste-for-discrimination model. These models shift focus from worker productivity to employer behavior, suggesting that hiring practices may exclude individuals based on perceived social and psychological traits. While field experiments and correspondence studies test these theories, they often fail to capture informal discrimination.

Recent critiques propose using vignette studies to provide ethically sound, multidimensional experimental designs, but these have yet to be widely adopted in examining gender bias in Nigerian workplaces.

2.5 Evaluation of Gender Bias in the Workplace
2.5.1 Language Used in Gender-Specific Job Postings
The language in job postings often unintentionally reinforces gender divisions in certain professions. Studies show that gendered language reduces women's interest in roles traditionally occupied by men (Stout and Dasgupta, 2011). Implicit indicators of gender bias discourage women from pursuing specific careers, perpetuating stereotypes that

align roles with traditional gender expectations.

2.5.2 Prejudice against Women in Credential Evaluation

Research indicates that female applicants undergo more scrutiny during hiring processes, with male applicants often favored despite identical qualifications (Foley, Cooper, and Mosseri, 2019). This pattern persists in Nigeria, where women's representation in federal civil service and private organizations remains limited. This study examines whether these biases continue to shape hiring decisions in Nigerian workplaces.

2.5.3 Application of Selection Criteria with A Gender Bias

Selection criteria are often manipulated to justify gendered hiring decisions. Studies reveal that evaluators frequently adjust job requirements to favor male candidates (Uhlmann and Cohen, 2005). These practices undermine meritocracy, allowing raters to rationalize biased decisions under the guise of objectivity.

2.6 Minimizing Unintentional Prejudice against Women
2.6.1 Blind Testing and Evaluation

Blind recruitment processes aim to eliminate gender bias by removing gender-related information from resumes. However, studies suggest that these methods are only partially effective, as evaluators may still infer gender through other details (Krause, Rinnie, and Zimmermann, 2012). This study explores the feasibility of blind hiring practices in the Nigerian context.

2.6.2 Formalizing Organizational Processes

Formal performance assessment systems can help reduce gender bias by clarifying evaluation criteria. However, even standardized tools are susceptible to bias due to their design and application. This study evaluates whether formalized processes in

Nigeria have been successful in promoting gender diversity.

2.6.3 Unintentional Gender Education

Diversity training programs aim to address unconscious gender biases. While initial evidence suggests these programs can reduce bias, their effectiveness diminishes over time. This study highlights the potential for tailored training initiatives to create lasting changes in workplace practices, particularly in Nigerian organizations.

Research Methodology
3.1 Introduction

Research methodology outlines the approach used to execute a study, ensuring validity and clarity. This chapter discusses the methodology applied, including case study selection, data collection methods, instruments used, and the data analysis process. It also examines the limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 Research Approach and Techniques

The study employed an interpretive philosophy to analyze gender discrimination in Nigeria, allowing for subjective exploration of the phenomenon. This approach contrasts with positivism, which relies on objective and detached data collection. An exploratory study was conducted, using inductive reasoning to develop hypotheses and recommendations based on observed patterns.

3.3 Research Illustration

Sampling was critical due to time constraints and the impracticality of studying entire populations. Four companies were selected as case studies to examine gender discrimination in hiring processes:
1. **Access Bank Plc**
2. **Dangote Cement Corporation, Ltd.**
3. **Airtel Nigeria**
4. **Ecobank Transnational Inc**

These organizations were chosen for their prominence in Nigeria's economy and accessibility to secondary data. The inclusion of diverse industries (banking,

manufacturing, and telecommunications) ensured comprehensive insights into the issue.

3.4 Data Gathering
The study relied on secondary data, leveraging prior research to address gaps and reevaluate existing knowledge on gender bias. Data sources included corporate websites, annual reports, and other archival documents. Key sources included:

- Access Bank's 2020 financial statements and website.
- Airtel Africa's 2021 annual report.
- Dangote Cement's financial records.
- Ecobank Group's 2020 annual report and website.

The literature review also provided critical insights into how gender biases manifest in hiring practices.

3.5 Examining the Data
Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns in the data. This method allowed for an exploratory approach to uncover key themes related to gender bias. Despite criticism of its subjectivity, thematic analysis is widely used for its ability to organize and summarize qualitative data.

3.6 Secondary Data Quality
The validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of secondary data were assessed. The study prioritized reputable Nigerian companies with long-standing credibility to ensure data quality. While the validity of this research cannot yet be cross-referenced with similar studies, the findings were carefully aligned with the research objectives to maximize their relevance.

3.7 Supplementary Information: Moral Aspects
Using secondary data eliminated the need for ethical approval. All sources were publicly available, and proper citations were made to adhere to ethical research standards and avoid plagiarism. Any potential ethical concerns, such as consent or participant de-identification, were deemed irrelevant due to the nature of the data.

Research Findings
4.1 Introduction
Promoting gender equality fosters a constructive work environment where employees of all genders may contribute significantly and help the organization reach its goals and objectives. Developing a robust and long-lasting pipeline of female talent requires an all-encompassing strategy. Nonetheless, research based on contemporary literature has discovered instances of gender discrimination in workplaces worldwide. This frequently indicates that a company is unable to benefit from the distinctive viewpoints and character traits that diversity and gender equality offer to the workplace. In order to demonstrate this, Stout and Dasgupta (2011) carried out an experimental study in which they found evidence of gender bias in the recruiting procedures of companies that utilized terms in their job advertisements that were either gender inclusive or exclusive. Similarly, it was discovered that implicit cues can encourage women's sense of ambient identity, which in turn can lead to gender discrimination Cheryan, et. al. (2009). Gberevbieet al. (2014) discovered evidence of gender prejudice in Nigeria, where it was used as a hiring criterion for positions of power in Nigerian universities. Comparable to prior research, but distinct from it, this study looks into the research question to see if it's present in different companies that have operations in Nigeria. Considering the data that was previously provided, the findings of the secondary research about the employment procedures and policies of the four case study companies are presented in this chapter. The annual reports, websites, and accounts of the organizations supplied the documentation data that was used in this study. Not to mention, you may look up all the information you need online regarding the four case study companies.

4.2. Comprehensive Analysis

The following findings were made by the researcher after looking at the prevalence of the current research problem:

4.2.1 Access Bank Nigeria Plc is the first case study.

According to the information on page 13 of the (ABN AR&A) Access Bank Nigeria Annual Reports& Accounts, 2020, Access Bank is a licenced bank in the nation that offers top-notch banking services. It is well known for having an extensive selection of "comprehensive financial product offerings." According to Accessbank plc (2022a), the bank employs a sizable number of "skilled, disciplined and ethical workforce employed to become strong professionals with affinity for leadership".

As a result, after online applications are received, the bank will hire and choose candidates for entry-level employment in the manner listed below, according to its official website (Access bank plc, 2022a).

1. Candidates are invited to take a written exam after meeting the bank's requirements.
2. Those that are chosen are invited to an open day event to meet people and learn more about how the bank operates.
3. Tests of essay writing and aptitude are used to further evaluate candidates. There are also panel interviews.
4. The HR manager's final interview.
5. A letter of employment is given to the final chosen candidates.

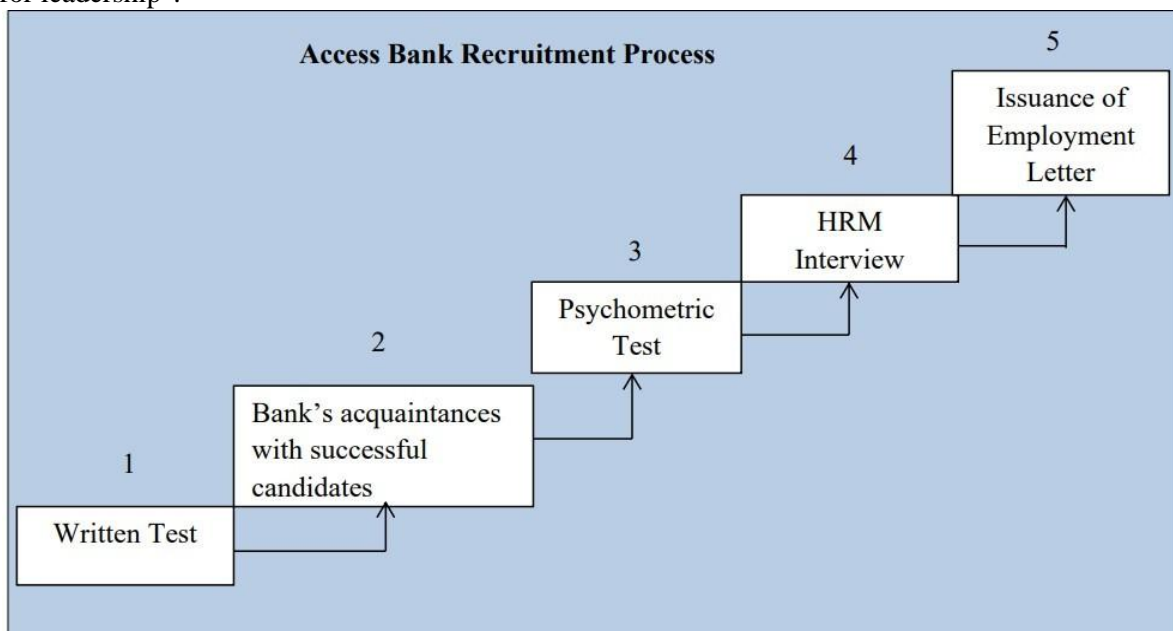The following figure shows the actions described above:

Fig. 4.1 Original work of the author.

According to the bank, candidates are only eligible to take written exams if they meet specific standards, and each job portfolio has unique requirements that must be fulfilled (Access bank plc, 2022 b).

The job descriptions for all positions on Access Bank of Nigeria's unique online application page, which posts all job advertisements, do not contain any language that is gender-specific. The gateway contains the following data, with an asterisk indicating a necessary field

Access Bank Online Portal Details		
Personal Information	**Profile**	**Details**
(1)*first name(2)*last name (3)*email(4)*phone(5) address(6)*photo	(1)education(2)experience (3)summary(additional note)(4)*resume(upload required)	(1)cover letter(2)*date of birth(3)expected monthly salary(4)*when to start work

The author elaborated on
Figure 4.2 Using data from Access bank plc (2022b).

4.2.1.1 Procedures for Employment and Assessment

"Gender-inclusive, equal opportunity, and non-discriminatory organizational culture" is how the bank describes its own culture (ABN AR & A, 2020, p.67). Because of this, it forbids discrimination of any kind in the assessment of job applications, choosing only the most qualified and experienced candidates for open positions, regardless of their physical appearance, gender, nationality, or ethnicity (ABN AR & A, 2020, p.124).

4.2.1.2 Diversity of Gender

According to the ABN annual and accounts, 2020, p. 67, Access Bank is in favour of an inclusive workplace where all workers are appreciated and given an equal chance to be their "authentic selves." Regardless of gender, this is accurate. The bank consistently implements plans, strategies, and initiatives aimed at enhancing gender parity throughout the board. To ensure that female employees are impacted in a number of ways, the bank, for instance, developed the Access Women Network (AWN), especially in light of the global lockdown that ensued after the COVID-19 epidemic (ABN AR & A, 2020, p.67).

4.2.1.3 HR: Employment Diversity Report

Using the bank's AR & A (2020, p. 124), the report below details the gender distribution of Access Bank Nigeria's (ABN) employees.

4.2.2 Dangote Cement Plc, Second Case Study

In the DC AR & A, 2020, Dangote Cement Plc is referred to as a "Sub-Saharan African leading company with a production capacity of 48.6 million tonnes per year across 10 countries" on page 1. The primary export centre is Nigeria, and the company's export objective is to make cement self-sufficient in West and Central Africa (Dangotecement, 2021a). Cement manufacturing is the speciality of Dangote Cement Plc, a branch of the Dangote Group.

Potential employees must complete the six steps of the hiring process, which are listed below (Dangotegroup, no date). Only when all hiring requirements have been satisfied is a choice made to hire.

1. To be eligible for a preliminary invitation, interested candidates must complete the firm's online registration form.
2. Candidates are shortlisted for functional screening if their qualifications fulfil the standards.
3. Interviews and further screening are conducted with potential candidates.
4. Last interview with HR personnel
5. Those who are selected for employment receive an offer letter.
6. As acknowledged employees, candidates are admitted into the organization.
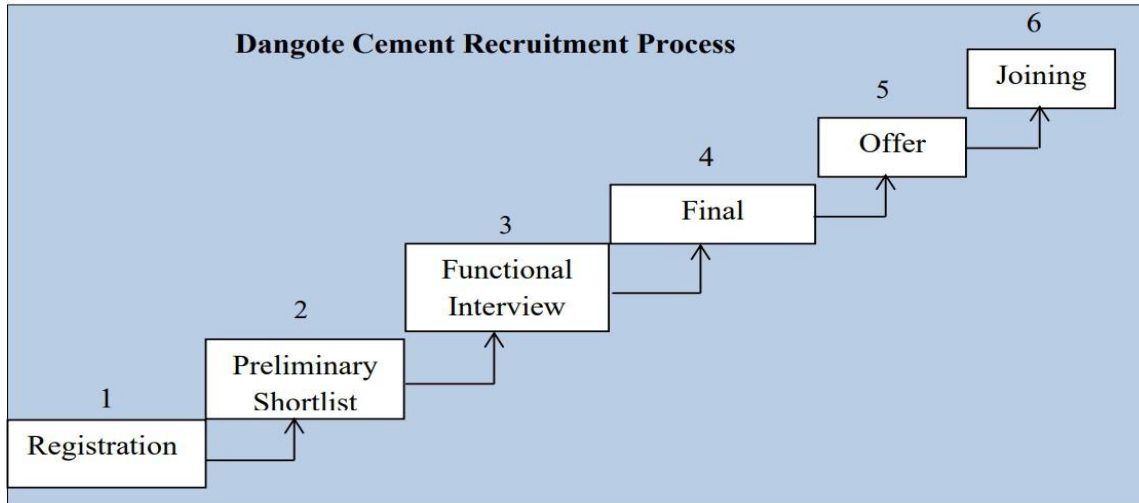
Figure 4.3 (No date) Source: Dangote group
Interested candidates can fill out a special
online application portal without having to
include any language that is gender-specific
in order to submit all the personal
Information required to be considered for a
spot on the preliminary shortlist. With fields
marked as required, the following
information is incorporated in the online
application environment:

Dangote Cement Online Portal Details		
Personal Information	**Experience**	**Details**
(1)*first name(2)*last name(3)*email(4)*headline(5)*date of birth(6)*gender(7)*marital status(8)*country(9)*geopolitical region(Nigerians only)(10)*state/province/department (11)*phone(12)zip/postal code(13)*address(14)*spoken language(15) *photo	(1)*work experience(2)*position held(3) reporting to (job title) supervisor(4)*date to resume(5)*summary	(1)*cover letter(2)*whatSapp number(3)*references–referees-2

Fig. 4.4 **Source:** Author's elaboration from (Dangotecement, 2021b)

4.2.2.1 Policy for Recruitment

Dangote Cement believes that diversity in the workforce promotes competitiveness and productivity; as a result, the company has a hiring policy that encourages the recruitment of individuals from a range of talent pools (DCAR&A) (Dangote Cement annual report and accounts, 2020, p.78). It gives everyone who wants to work for the company equal opportunities and does away with any form of discrimination based on colour, age, gender, or ethnicity (Dangote Cement A R & A, 2020, p. 78).

4.2.2.2 Gender Diversity

The DC A R & A, 2020, p. 78 states that the company is unwaveringly dedicated to fostering an inclusive workplace where all workers, regardless of gender, receive respect and dignity. It started an employment campaign in 2020 that makes it possible for people with physical disabilities and people of all ages to work together (DC annual report and accounts, 2020, p. 78). In 2020, Dangote Cement Plc invested heavily in the training of many female employees across several nations to guarantee that the level of contribution needed from them to consistently reach the company's goal remains comparable to that of their male
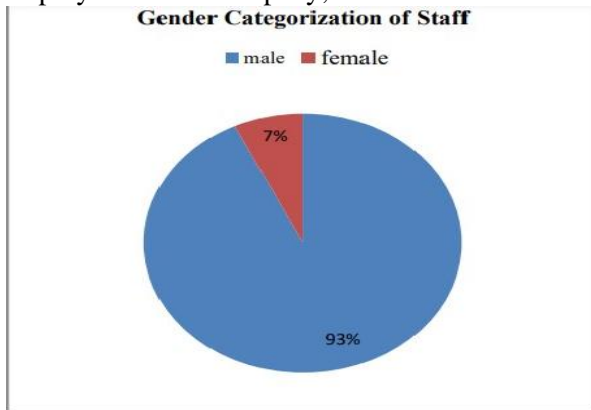
coworkers (DC annual report and accounts, 2020, page.29). As discrimination, harassment, or inappropriate behavior is not tolerated, this was done in an effort to promote diverse and inclusive workplaces for women of all genders.

4.2.2.3 HR: Report on Employment Diversity

Twelve of the firm's fifteen directors were men and three were women as of December 2020 (DC AR & A 2020, p. 78). The board also consisted of fifteen people.

Among them were twelve guys and three women. There were 439 senior management employees in the company; 381 of them were men and 58 were women. 11,412 people worked for Dangote Cement, including 10,608 men and 804 women (DC annual report and accounts 2020, p. 27). In addition, 319 foreign workers, 2853 temporary workers, and 8240 permanent employees made up the 11,412 total workforces. The total number of permanent employees was 7510 men and 730 women. Furthermore, 7920 workers belonged to the age group of 31 to 50, whilst 1810 workers were between the ages of 18 and 30. In contrast, 1682 employees were 51 years of age or older.

The HR composition of Dangote Cement Plc is depicted in the following diagrams:

Gender Categorization of Staff

Male	-	10608	93%
Female	-	804	7%

Fig. 4.7 **Source:** Author's elaboration from DC annual report and accounts, 2020, p.78

Age Categorization of Staff
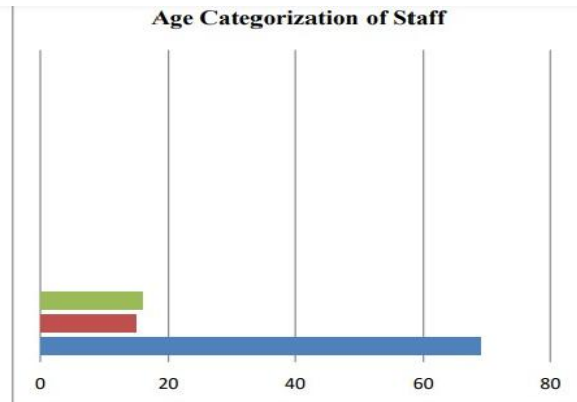
18 − 30	1810	16%
31 − 50	7920	69%
51 and above	1682	15%

Fig. 4.8 **Source:** DC annual report and accounts 2020, p. 27

Gender Categorization of Directors/Board Members

Male	-	12	80%
Female	-	3	20%

Fig. 4.5. **Source:** Author's elaboration from DC annual report and accounts, 2020, p.78

Gender Categorization of Top Management Position
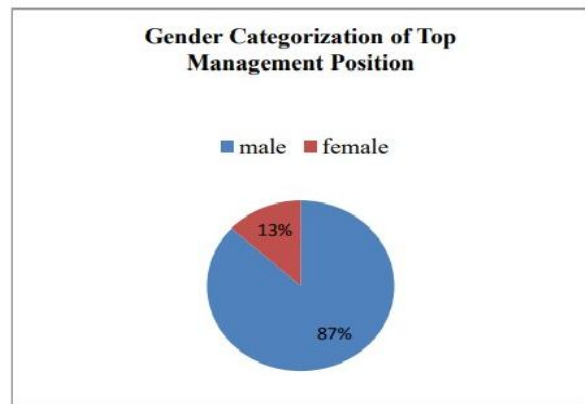
Male	-	381	87%
Female	-	58	13%

Fig. 4.6. **Source:** DC annual report and accounts 2020, p.27
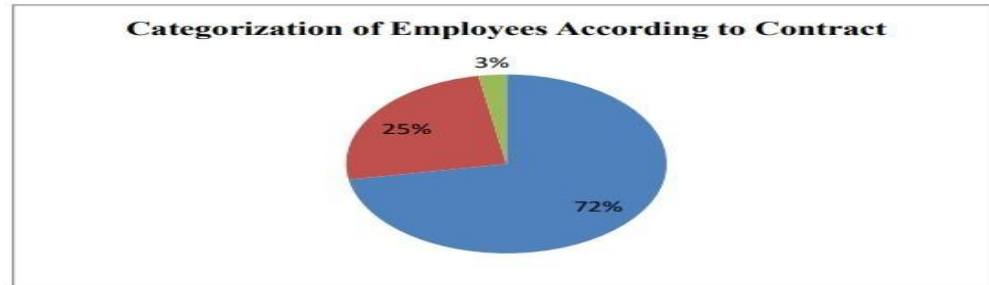
Fig. 4.9 **Source:** DC annual report and accounts 2020, p. 27

4.2.3 Eco Bank Nigeria Plc, Case Study No. 3.

Since its founding idea was to create a bank serving the "wider business community" in West Africa and eventually the entire continent, Ecobank has earned the nickname "the pan African bank" (Ecobank, 2022). Currently, the bank has increased its footprint in 35 Sub-Saharan African nations (ECO BANK GROUP AR, 2020, p. 26). Moreover, the establishment of Eco Bank Nigeria Plc aimed to enhance the bank's reputation in western Africa.

Finding applicants who share the bank's core principles is the main goal of the employment process (ECO BANK GROUP, annual report, 2020, p. 32; Ecobank, 2022), with no job function using terminology that is specific to a candidate's gender.

4.2.3.1 Policy for Recruitment

Ecobank is a provider of equal employment opportunities that takes pride in making sure that gender equality is given substantial consideration as a fundamental value when hiring new employees (Ecobank, 2022). Furthermore, the bank does not accept discrimination of any type, including gender discrimination (ECO Bank Group, A R, 2020, page.83).

4.2.3.2 Gender Diversity

The bank is an organization that respects the unique viewpoint and contributions that female employees bring to the workplace. Maintaining gender balance and diversity is facilitated by guaranteeing women's equal access to resources, employment opportunities, and benefits. For instance, take a look at its talent management strategy, which explains why there are more and more women in senior leadership positions both inside and outside the organization (ECO Bank Group annual report, 2020, page.96).

4.2.3.3 Application Mode

Applications for employment should be sent to HRRecruitment@ecobank.com, the bank's email address.

Applicants are invited to advance to the next step of the employment process if their expertise and educational background meet the bank's requirements.

4.2.3.4 HR - Diversity in Employment Report

There were 14023 employees working with the bank as of 2020. Of this number, 54% were men and 46% were women (ECO Bank Group annual report, 2020, p.93). Men made up 69% of senior management and leadership positions, while women made up 31%. The composition of the 14-member board was 10 males and 4 females, or 71% and 29%, respectively. In addition, the age distribution of bank employees was as follows: Of the bank staff, 3527 belonged to the under-30 age group, and 5951 to the 31–40 age group.

The bank employed 3894 individuals between the ages of 41 and 50 and 499 individuals between the ages of 51 and 55 during this time (ECO Bank Group annual report, annual report, 2020, p.93). There were just 152 workers above the age of 55 (ECO Bank Group annual report, 2020, p. 93). The analysis that was previously described is shown in the graph that follows.
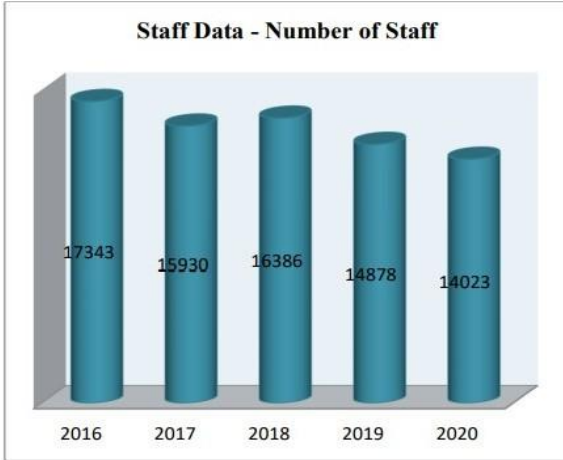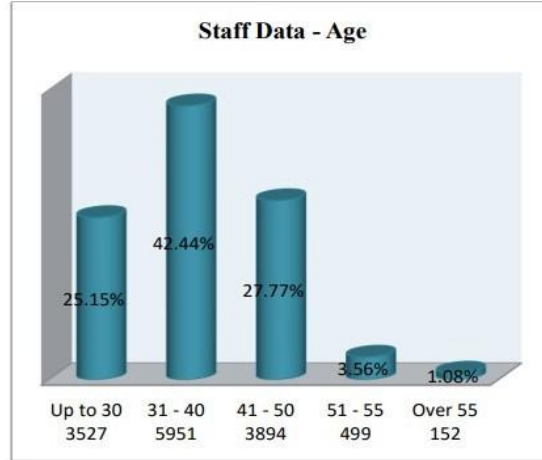

Fig. 4.10 **Source:** EGB annual report, 2020, p. 93.
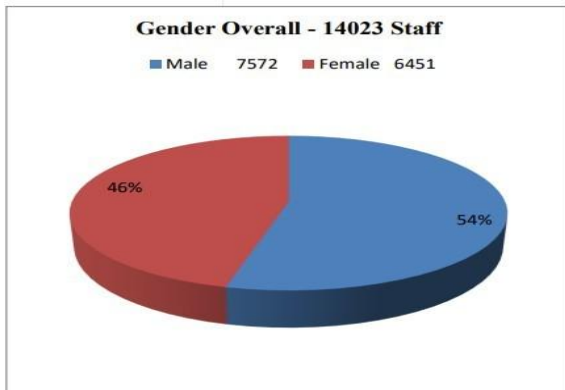

Fig. 4.11 **Source:** EGB annual report, 2020, p. 93.

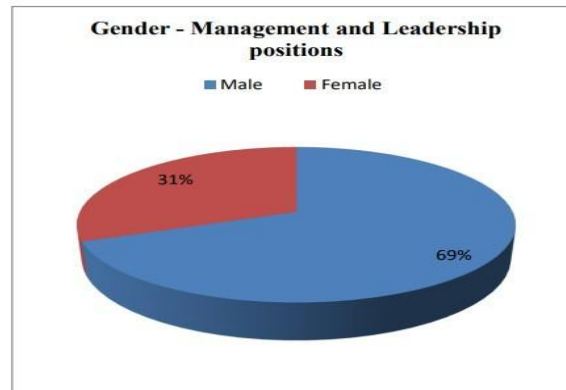Fig. 4.12 **Source:** EGB annual report, 2020, p. 93.

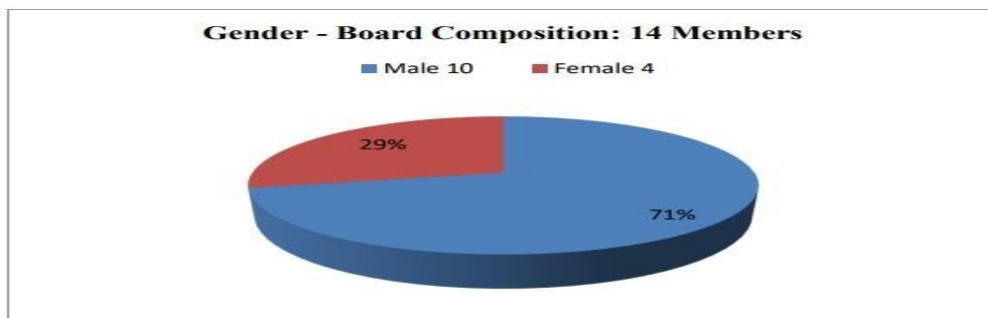; Fig. 4.13 **Source:** EGB annual report, 2020, p. 93

Fig. 4.14 **Source:** Author's elaboration from EGB annual report, 2020, pp. 54 – 55.

4.2.4 Airtel Nigeria Plc is the fourth case study.

Airtel Nigeria Plc, a prominent mobile telecom company in Nigeria that is a member of the Airtel Africa Group, is dedicated to transforming lives across the nation by providing Nigerians with engaging, cost-effective, and excellent mobile services (AA AR & A, 2021, p. 1). Airtel Africa plc (AA AR & A, 2021, p. 1) was the impetus behind the business's historic launch of the global system for mobile communications (GSM) services in Nigeria, with the intention of catering to "14 Sub-Saharan countries" and "118.2 million people" (LinkedIn, no date). Since then, it has accomplished a "series of many firsts" in the very competitive national telecom sector (LinkedIn, no date). For instance, it was the first to introduce GSM services into each of Nigeria's six geographic zones.

Comparable hiring Practices are followed by Airtel Nigeria plc for entry-level individuals, who are chosen by the following techniques, much like by the company's major shareholder, Bharti Airtel Limited India (Airtel Africa, no date):

1. Candidates whose educational background and work history satisfy the standard standards are invited to apply and are then required to take a technical test to assess their technical aptitude.
2. To assess the candidates' technical knowledge, a follow-up technical interview is held. Successful applicants typically go to the next stage.
3. A second round of interviews, known as "panel interviews," is held to assess each applicant's capacity in more detail. In order to go to the next stage, candidates must respond to a series of prompt questions that are posed.
4. This completes the last phase of the selecting procedure. In this interview, the candidates' biographical information, expectations for the position, and unique demeanour are revealed.
5. Before the final selection of potential workers is finished, those who make it through all of the aforementioned phases are referred for a physical examination to certify their level of fitness. It is crucial to keep in mind that candidates who do not move on to the next level are not approved and are completely eliminated from consideration. A schematic of the previously mentioned steps can be found below:
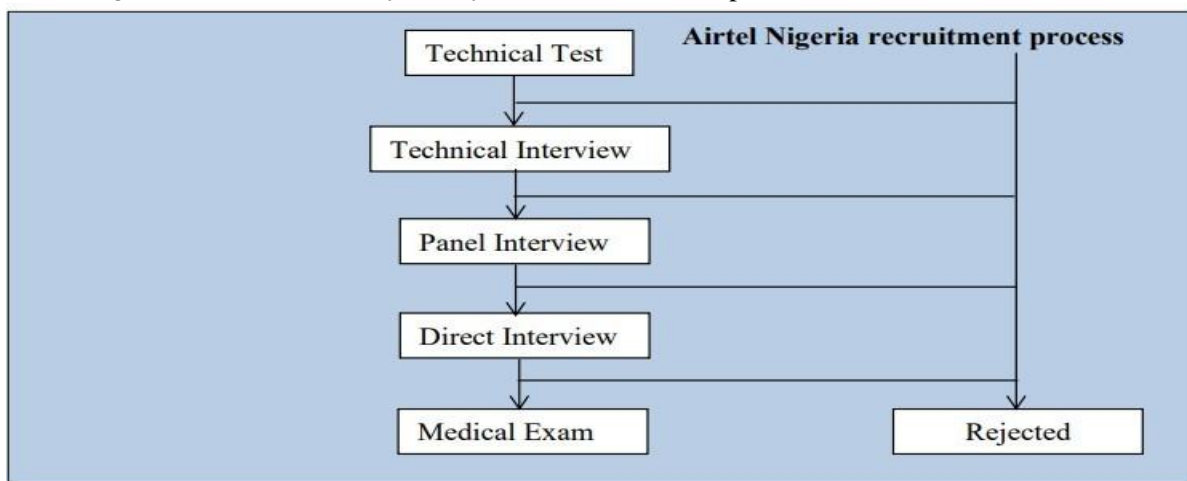

Fig. 4.15 **Source:** Adapted from Bhaduri, 2013, P. 47.

Airtel Nigeria plc announces job openings and takes applications via its LinkedIn profile without attaching any language that is specific to a candidate's gender, in contrast to other companies who have their own online application platforms. The LinkedIn application criteria include the following information, with the following fields

marked with an asterisk that must be   completed:

Airtel Online Portal Details		
Contact Information	**Resume**	**Additional Requirement**
(1)*email(2)*phone	*upload required	(1)*education level(2)*work experience(3)*work experience rating

Figure 4.16. From (LinkedIn, no date) with adaptation

4.2.4.1 The Recruitment Policy
Airtel Nigeria plc, as stated on page 53 of the AA annual report and accounts, 2021, is an equal opportunity employer that hires new employees only based on merit. The business's code of conduct, which continues to promote complete diversity and inclusion, clearly reflects this (AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 53). This is accomplished by closely adhering to the previously specified standards, with the understanding that an applicant may only advance in the recruiting process based on merit (Airtel Africa, no date, p. 16). Appendix A contains more information on Airtel Nigeria plc's hiring procedures. Additionally, the organisation is against any biassed employment Practices , including those that are based on racial, tribal, or ethnic affinities, gender stereotypes, or other factors.

4.2.4.2 Gender Diversity
Through its framework for sustainability strategy, Airtel Nigeria plc measures disparities by giving every employee a chance to demonstrate its sincere commitment to attaining comprehensive diversity and inclusion within its workforce.

4.2.4.3 HR: Employment Diversity Report
As of December 2021, Airtel Africa plc employed 3526 individuals in total. Top executives, board members, Operating Company(OpCo) executive members, and other staff personnel were included in this group. 925 women and 2601 men, or 26% and 74% of the population, respectively, made up the population (Airtel Africa annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114). The following conclusions were reached after more research into the situation of the employees (Airtel Africa annual report and finances, 2021, p. 114): There were three women and eight men on the board. 525 men and 121 women made up the 646 workers in senior and intermediate managerial positions. The group executive committee of the company consisted of 14 people, 13 of whom were men and 1 woman. In addition, 159 individuals comprised the OpCo executive committee, with 123 males and 36 women. There were 2707 employees in total, 40 men and 767 women. The data given above is displayed in the table below:

Gender Composition of the Group's Employees in %

Category	Women (%)	Men (%)	Total
Group Board	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	11
Group Executive Committee Member	1 (7%)	13 (93%)	14
OpCo Executive Member	36 (23%)	123 (77%)	159
Senior and Middle Management	121 (19%)	525 (81%)	646
All other Employees	767 (28%)	1940 (72%)	2707
Total	**925 (26%)**	**2601 (74%)**	**3526**

Fig. 4.17 **Source:** AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114)

More detailed information regarding the gender composition of Airtel Africa plc and other important facts are displayed in the following charts:
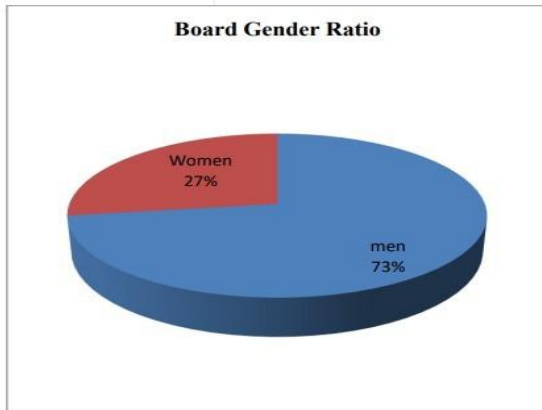

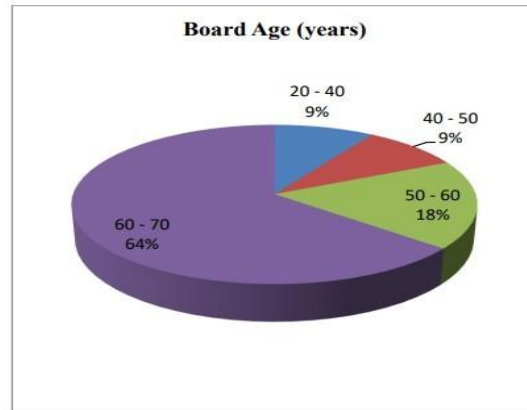Fig. 4.18 **Source:** AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 85

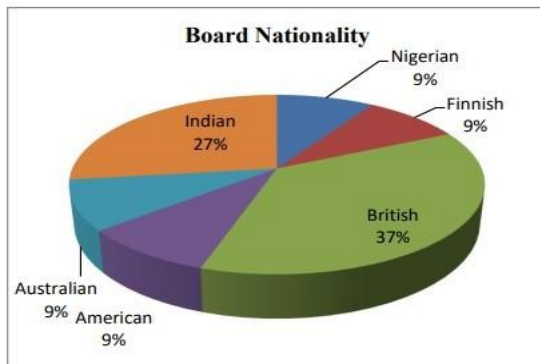Fig. 4.19 **Source:** AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 85

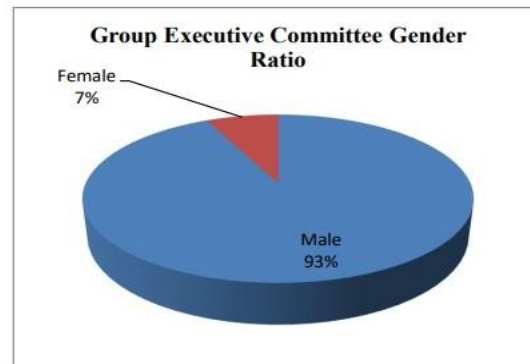Fig. 4.20 **Source:** AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 85

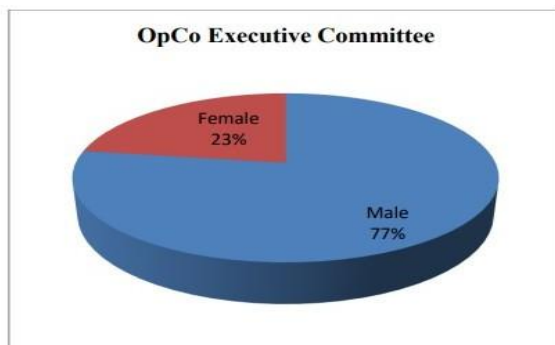Fig. 4.21 **Source:** Author's elaboration from AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114

Fig. 4.22 **Source:** Author's elaboration from AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114)
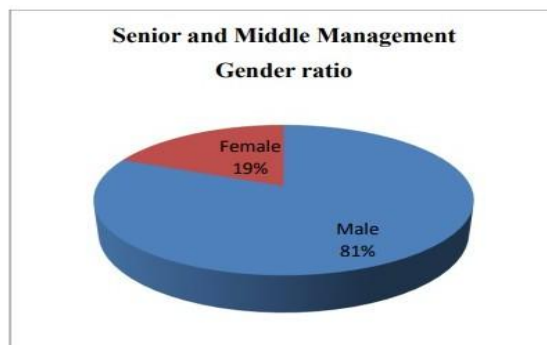

Fig. 4.23 **Source:** Author's elaboration from AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114)
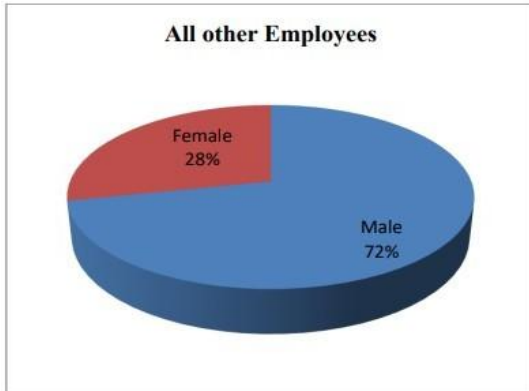
Fig. 4.24 **Source:** Author's elaboration from AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114)
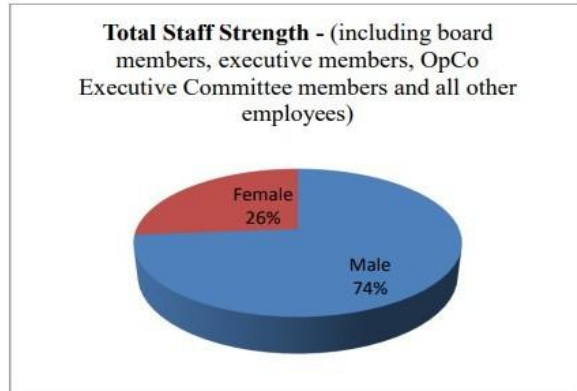
Fig. 4.25 **Source:** Author's elaboration from AA annual report and accounts, 2021, p. 114)

Review and Appraisal of Research Results
Introduction

The chapter assesses findings from case study firms to determine evidence of unconscious gender bias in recruitment practices and evaluates related literature to propose a framework addressing these biases.

Key Findings
1. **Meritocracy vs. Reality**:
o Case study firms claim to prioritize meritocracy in hiring. For example, Dangote Cement Plc, Access Bank, and Ecobank emphasize gender diversity and equality in their policies. However, significant gaps between stated policies and actual practices suggest the persistence of unconscious gender bias.

o

o Dangote Cement has a workforce predominantly composed of men (92%

o gender gap), with similar disparities in senior management roles and age-related preferences favoring individuals aged 31-50.

2. **Gender Distribution**:
o Access Bank employs 46% women overall, but gender disparities exist in executive and senior roles, with a "glass ceiling" limiting women's progression.

o Ecobank exhibits a 15% gender gap in its workforce, with women occupying less than 30% of board positions.

o Airtel Africa Plc shows less than 30% female representation across various employee categories, compounded by potential racial bias in its board composition.

3. **Unconscious Gender Bias in Job Portals and Resumes**:
o Online recruitment systems often request gender-sensitive information (e.g., names, photos), potentially enabling unconscious bias during candidate selection.

4. **Gender Diversity Policies**:
o While all firms have documented gender diversity strategies, the implementation is inconsistent, reflecting poorly executed policies that perpetuate male dominance.

Notable Observations:
• **Glass Ceiling Effect**: Systemic biases favor men in leadership positions, limiting opportunities for women in senior roles.
• **Age Bias**: A preference for hiring individuals aged 31-50, with limited opportunities for younger or older candidates.
• **Racial Bias**: At Airtel Africa, the nationality of board members raises questions about racial diversity and inclusion.

Implications:
• Despite well-documented policies, unconscious biases in recruitment practices continue to hinder genuine
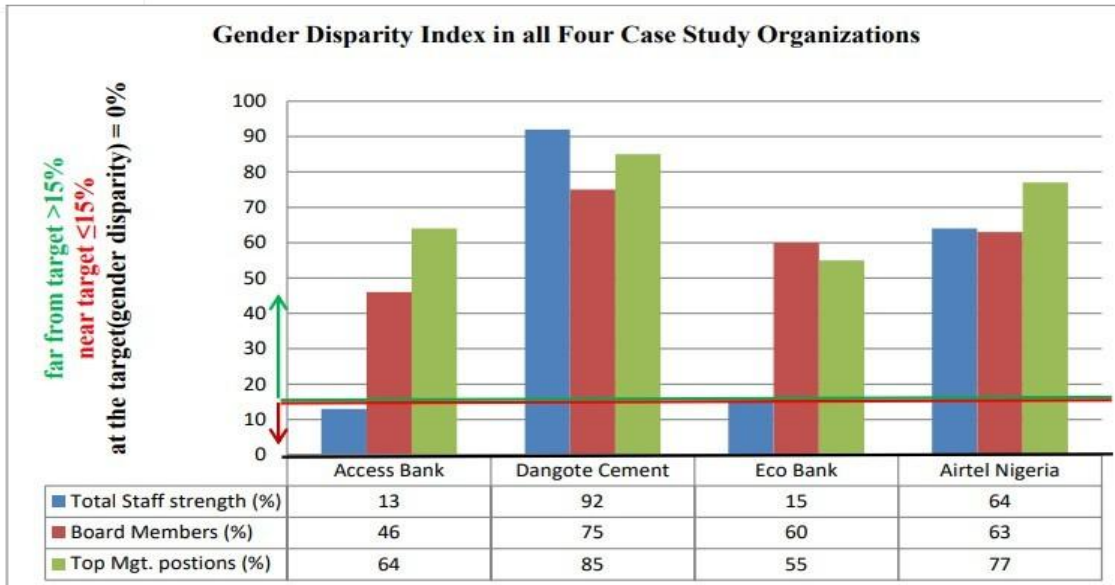
progress toward gender equality and diversity.

- These biases not only limit opportunities for women but also undermine the diversity of perspectives essential for innovation and organizational success.

Recommendations:

1. Implement anonymous recruitment systems to eliminate gender-sensitive identifiers during the hiring process.

2. Strengthen the enforcement of gender diversity policies to align stated objectives with actual practices.

3. Address societal and organizational biases through regular training and awareness programs for HR and management teams.

4. Ensure transparent performance evaluation and career progression criteria to mitigate unconscious bias.

Gender Disparity Index in all Four Case Study Organizations

	Access Bank	Dangote Cement	Eco Bank	Airtel Nigeria
Total Staff strength (%)	13	92	15	64
Board Members (%)	46	75	60	63
Top Mgt. postions (%)	64	85	55	77

Explanation from Appendices B, C, and D by the author is used in Fig. 5.1.

5.2.4 Analysing Gender Inequality and Discriminatory Hiring Practices

The researcher's findings support the notion that gender diversity strategies have been institutionalized, but the above figure shows that gender inequality persists at all levels in all case study organizations—Access Bank and Eco Bank Plc being the only exceptions in the category of total staff strength—regardless of purported claims to the contrary. Unconscious gender prejudice is exacerbated by the underlying gender inequality disadvantages that currently exist since women typically bring less perspective, flexibility, and ingenuity to the job. Productivity and competitiveness may suffer as a result (Herring, 2009).

5.3 Developing a Novel All-Inclusive Framework

In light of the theories that have been explored in the literature about unconscious gender prejudice, this study puts forth a model (figure 5.2) that embraces the ways in which working situations give rise to this issue and suggest strategies for dealing with it. With a framework that has not yet been empirically verified in an organisational setting, it establishes the parameters for upcoming empirical research. According to Skov (2020), American Association Of University Women (2016), Gaddes et al. (2018), and other authors, an individual is considered to be guilty of unconscious gender prejudice if they purposefully reject gender norms but accidentally exhibit discriminatory behaviours when making decisions or passing judgement. Results from

previous research on the topic are congruent with this.

According to Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb (2011), "as the powerful and yet often invincible barriers to women's advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, Practices , and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men." Men are usually given preference for societal and economic benefits over women, according to a 2017 ILO research. This outcome lends greater support to the previously stated theory. Since the researcher's analysis demonstrates evidence of male preference or favouritism over their female counterpart while recruiting in all four case study businesses, the findings of the earlier studies are pertinent to the current investigation. The high margins of gender disparity that exist, the result of implicit

discrimination against women in all job categories inside these organisations, lend credence to this (see figure 5.1). Understanding the root reasons of unconscious gender bias, which results from expressing gender preference as indicated by the downward-pointing arrow (figure 5.2), is crucial. This is explained by the framework in two ways:

1.   Over time, some managers, bosses, supervisors, and other employees have made sexual harassment a common Practice in the workplace. This activity happens "where a potential victim is conditioned to give in, to secure favours such as employment, promotions, and other workplace opportunities," and it can be done overtly or covertly." (Olalekan and Adegboyega, 2020, p.196).
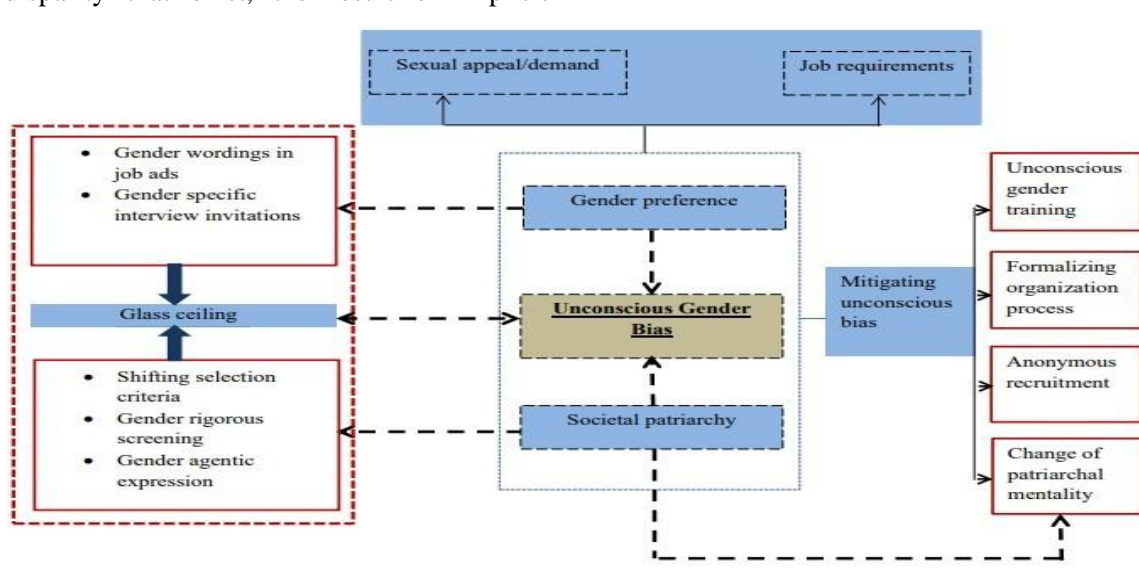

Fig. 5.2: A Comprehensive Framework for Recognizing and Addressing Inadvertent Gender Bias in the Workplace

1. Gender-Based Recruitment Practices

- Studies show recruiters may prefer certain genders based on stereotypes or societal roles (e.g., men for physically demanding jobs or women for clerical roles). However, case studies reveal no evidence of recruitment driven by "sexually appealing reasons" or harassment.

- Patriarchal beliefs, such as those rooted in religious and cultural ideologies, still dominate hiring decisions in Nigeria, leading to gender disparities.

2. The Glass Ceiling in Recruitment

- Implicit Bias in Job Ads: Gendered wording in ads subtly discourages female applicants, though this was not directly observed in case study organizations.

- Gender-Specific Interview Invitations: Men are often favored for interviews in leadership roles despite equal

qualifications, a trend not directly substantiated by the case study data but supported by broader literature.
- Screening and Advancement: Unfair changes to selection criteria during recruitment disproportionately disadvantage women, perpetuating the glass ceiling effect.

3. Patriarchal Mindset
- Deeply entrenched societal beliefs regarding gender roles limit women's advancement to senior positions.
- The influence of patriarchy manifests in stringent screening practices, biased perceptions of female capabilities, and reliance on stereotypes that favor male leadership traits over female ones.

4. Strategies for Addressing Unconscious Gender Bias
- Unconscious Bias Training: Regular training for HR personnel to minimize bias in decision-making.
- Formalized Processes: Standardized hiring and evaluation criteria to ensure meritocracy.
- Anonymous Recruitment Practices: Implementing software to mask identifiers like names, photos, and voice characteristics during screening and interviews.

5. Shifting Patriarchal Thinking
- Long-term societal change through education reform, emphasizing gender equality from a young age.
- Businesses and recruiters should actively work toward dismantling the glass ceiling by promoting women in leadership roles and addressing traditional biases.

5.4 Summary of Findings
- Significant gender disparities exist across all case study organizations despite stated commitments to meritocracy and gender diversity.
- Key issues include unstructured hiring practices, inexperienced evaluators, and societal patriarchy reinforcing workplace bias.
- Anonymous recruitment, standardized PETs, and consistent training for HR

staff are recommended to reduce implicit bias and restore meritocracy.

Conclusions, Suggestions, Consequences, Restrictions, and Additional Research

6.1 Introduction
This chapter summarizes the key findings, significance, and implications of the study while addressing its limitations and recommendations for future research.

6.2 Overarching Conclusions
- Every employee, regardless of gender, possesses unique skills and expertise that contribute to organizational success. The study reinforces the importance of a **Gender Diversity Strategy**, which promotes equal representation and enhances adaptability, creativity, and efficiency.
- Despite policies promoting gender diversity, unconscious gender bias persists in Nigerian workplaces, disadvantaging women in both entry-level and senior management roles. This bias deprives organizations of diverse perspectives and teamwork benefits.
- Gender-sensitive data requirements (e.g., name, sex, photos) in hiring processes exacerbate implicit biases. The study advocates for **anonymous recruitment** to mitigate these issues.
- Findings indicate that systemic patriarchal ideologies perpetuate gender discrimination in Nigeria, contributing to disparities at all organizational levels.

6.3 Recommendations
1. **Preset Criteria and Training**:
   o Institutionalize standardized criteria for recruitment to ensure merit-based decisions.
   o Train performance evaluators to eliminate unconscious biases.
2. **PET Revisions**:
   o Design performance evaluation tools (PETs) free of implicit gender bias.
3. **Anonymous Recruitment**:

o Implement blind evaluation systems to remove gender-sensitive identifiers.

4. **Promoting Gender Diversity**:

o Actively ensure equal representation in entry-level and senior roles.

5. **Patriarchal Mindset Shift**:

o Advocate for societal changes to dismantle beliefs upholding male superiority.

6.4 Theoretical Consequences

- A framework was developed to highlight triggers of unconscious gender bias, including:

1. Gender preference linked to systemic patriarchy.

2. Influence of gender stereotypes in creating biased PETs.

- The study identifies the "glass ceiling" as a significant barrier preventing women from advancing in their careers and offers strategies for addressing these issues.

- Future empirical research is recommended to test the framework in organizational settings.

6.5 Consequences for Management and Industry

- Managers must actively address implicit biases in hiring decisions to improve organizational productivity and foster gender equality.

- Establishing standardized hiring practices and PETs can enhance objectivity in employee progression decisions.

- Companies should utilize **blind evaluations** to eliminate gender-sensitive bias and emphasize ongoing education through training and workshops.

-

6.6 Restrictions and Additional Study

- **Limitations**:

1. The study's small sample size of four organizations limits its generalizability.

2. Implicit gender bias is discussed conceptually rather than empirically validated.

Future Research Directions:

3. Conduct larger-scale studies to confirm findings across diverse organizations.

4. Explore reasons for the gender imbalance in Nigerian workplaces in greater detail.

5. Empirically test the proposed framework to refine its applicability and effectiveness.

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