

# WOMEN AND THEIR EDUCATION: ISSUES, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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## **Abstract.**

*The main focus of this paper is to examine issues related to women education, its problems and prospects. The paper looked at issues and problems that may be described as barriers of the provision of education for women, such as the socio-cultural, economic status, and gender. The prospects of women education was also examined like, the ability of education to empower, increase or uplift the status of women and is an of upward social mobility for them. Lastly, suggestions were put forward on how to improve the amount and quality of education for women. For example, the re-launching of the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) is commendable, however, the factors that affected the last programme should be identified with a view to making amendment with particular emphasis on gender issues.*

## **Introduction**

Education is a powerful tool or instrument for national socio-economic development. The universalisation of access to education is a fundamental factor for achieving socio-economic transformation and technological growth and advancement. Right from the time of independence, Nigeria recognized the indispensability of education as a tool for national development, and also as a powerful instrument devised by man for his own improvement. The National

Policy on Education (1977), revised 1981) fashioned along this philosophical line and points out categorically that education are a dynamic instrument par excellence for effecting social change and national development. It is generally accepted that education is not only an instrument for National development, but it is also the gateway to knowledge and development both for the individual and Society. Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the skills and productive capacities of the labour force. Education promotes economic growth and development. Girls and women education is facing a great and sustained inequality, disadvantage and oppression. The existence of gender inequality is brazenly unequivocal (Osinula, 1994).

Article I of the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in Jomtein, Thailand, in 1990, affirmed, "every person child, youth and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs". This affirmation was enclosed later that year at the World Summit for Children (WSC), which in its final declaration stated that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000 (UNICEF, 2001).

Furthermore, the same document (UNICEF, 2001) maintained that the right of all Nigerians to education has also featured in successive Nigerian Constitutions (in Chapter 2, section 18 in the case of current 1999 constitution), and the achievement of Universal primary education has long been a goal of the Nigeria Government.

### **Women Education: Issues And Problems.**

The attitudes about educating girls and women are significant factor causing educational inequalities between males and females. Women have been victims of educational and social inequalities. Meighan (1981) contended that inequality of educational opportunity among boys and girls is usually seen as a problem that would disappear with co-educational system of education. Therefore, less attention is paid to the problem, thereby placing women and girls under a lot of educational disadvantages.

Preference for male children is more pervasive and more strongly felt than that of female progeny. Boys are generally socialized to be inquiring, adventurous or *venture some*, to subdued, conquer or at the very least understand nature; while girls are expected to be obedient malleable, traditional (which often involves subordination) and preservers of nature. The tragedy in the situation is that

women are themselves chief agents of the socialization patterns, practices and attitudes that confer inequality of their kind. (Osinula, 1994).

Throughout the world, females are the victims of educational inequalities. This is not an isolated phenomenon but directly one that reflects the monopoly or semi-monopoly, which men enjoy in the higher levels of the economy and the policy. It is common in Africa for sons to receive education before daughters and for the latter to catch up only as schooling becomes universal for boys. Even then considerable inequalities of enrolment are common at the post-primary level (Blakemore and Cooksey, 1981, p.49). The position of women generally within the structure of society has always been such that they are relegated to the background in almost all spheres of life namely, education, occupation, politics, economy and production.

In the light of this, one can rightly argue that women's experience of educational inequality of both access and outcomes has caused them to be affected in other spheres of life. This might not be unconnected with the fact that education helps an individual to function well in the society as well as a major agent for upward social mobility in society.

However, the under-enrolment of girls in our schools and colleges may not be unconnected with a lot of factors that determine access to schools, such as background, culture, rural-urban etc. For example, it is in the rural areas that the largest gap between male and female enrolment levels are found. This sometimes reflects the sexual division of labour in the village. Overall young-girls labour is more essential than young boys both in domestic spheres (e.g. cooking, baby-minding, water carrying and sometimes-in agriculture (Blackemore and Cooksey, 1981).

Osinula (1994) described the existence of gender inequality in education as brazenly unequivocal. The UNDP Human Development Report (1992) notes that although the gender disparities in education and health have narrowed in industrial countries, in developing countries the female-male disparities remain very wide. In Nigeria where the provisional results of the 1991 population Census put the total figure for males and females at 44,544,5311 and 43,969,970 respectively, the disparity in education is indispensable (Osinula, 1994). Improving and increasing access to education for all irrespective of sex is a major concern of the various governments (Federal and States) for national growth and development.

Education as a social endeavour is required fundamentally to nurture and develop our natural intelligence. Therefore, education should be open to all irrespective of sex or gender. UNICEF's state of the world children 1999 report reveals that there is correlation between years of schooling and child mortality rates. Basically, education helps people learn how to achieve fundamental human rights such as health, nutrition and safe motherhood, while improving the quality of life. There are many reasons why girls drop out of school. Some of these reasons are, early marriage, health reasons, lack of school fees, domestic chores, care of younger siblings, and economic factors such as petty hawking.

However, despite the laudable attempts made to make education more accessible, available evidence shows that not all social groups have equal access to education. There are many factors that might account for the imbalance of the sexes in schools; the most important one could be the parent's attitudes towards the education of girls and the sex stereo-typing of girls in society. This therefore means that parental attitude is coloured by culture. Parental attitudes about gender roles results in some families giving greater priority to the enrolment and learning achievement of boys than that of girls. Specifically speaking, the following are some of the issues and problems in relation to Girls and women education in Nigeria.

- ❖ Girls remain doubly at a disadvantage in most northern states, especially in the rural areas. Not only are the overall national enrolment rates much lower than in the south or in urban areas, but also proportionately fewer girls are enrolled. In Katsina and Sokoto, there are twice as many boys as girls enrolled in junior secondary schools (FGN/UNICEF/UNESCO/UNDP E-2000). In both those states, as well as Jigawa the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls was well under 10 percent in 1996.
- ❖ Poverty is a fundamental factor which tend to prevents many families from enrolling all or some of their children in school or forces them to withdraw their children prematurely from school, because of the poor socio-economic status of parents.
- ❖ Cultural practices such, as the early marriage of girls is also an important causal factor for girl's dropout from school, especially in the northern part of the country.

- ❖ Attitudes about gender roles results in some families giving greater priority to the enrolment and learning achievement of boys than that of girls.
- ❖ The cost of sending a child to school: this include tuition fees, levies, costs of uniform, food, examination fees, textbooks and learning material, pocket money and cost of transport. This is particularly problematic to the lower/working class families of parents.
- ❖ Children in rural areas, particularly girls have to skip school to help with farming or engage in such time-consuming chores e.g. the fetching of water, firewood, taking care of younger siblings, and petty hawking etc.
- ❖ It is common in cities or urban areas to see school age girls hawking on the streets in order to augment family income. School absenteeism tends to be highest on market days or during peak farming periods. Thus, this may likely cause poor school performance and cases of drop out among girls.
- ❖ Parents hold the key to enrolment; some parents tend to give priority to the schooling of boys, rather than girls, especially in large families where funds are insufficient to enroll all children.  
In some families, investing in girls education is regarded as investing for the benefit of the family she will eventually marry into, unlike in the case of boys. This case has socio-economic implication for the poor families or parents.
- ❖ All the factors which stand to hinder the accessibility, retention and completion of school that are mentioned thus far, are educational barriers that introduce inequality in educational opportunities at primary school level, resulting in clear differences at post-primary level as well.

### **Prospects Of Women Education.**

Aggrey was quoted in Castle (1965) saying 'When you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a women you educate a family'. Women are the centers of the family, main custodians of cultural, social and fundamental values of the society. No society or community can develop fully without their co-operation, understanding and effective participation (Salawu, 1985).

Education is fundamentally an agent of socialization of people into the socio-cultural aspects of the society. In the modern times more and more people

are becoming aware of the need and value of school education, for personal, socio-economic and cultural development of the country. In addition, education today has been realized to be a strong weapon or agent of social integration in society.

The inequality of access to education by girls and women has been attributed to cultural and religious factors, these include early marriage, economic factors such as cost of processing education, location of schools far away from home, burden of domestic work, opportunity cost of formal education by parents in terms of earning by children, unsettled life styles of some groups such as nomads and location of some settlements such as the riverine areas (Aina and Abdullahi, 1995).

- i. Educating women increase their status input in family, community and national development. Educating women improves their quality of life in the society because the benefit they have derived from education will enable them have positive attitude to the education of their children, place higher premium on their children's health and the general well being of their families.
- ii. Education empowers women with the basic knowledge of their rights as individuals and citizens who enable them contribute to society in many ways. In view of this therefore, there is the need to plan well and put in place policies that will further enhance the education of girls and women for a better society. For example, there is need for more aggressive public enlightenment campaigns to sensitize parents and girls to imbibe the relevance of education. In another development Salawu, (1989) maintained that:

*The cultural mores and folkways of a society are transmitted more effectively through its women than its men. It is the mother who given children their training in correct social attitudes, conscience, morals and manners, since they spend their formative years before they are of conventional school age (p.30).*

- iii. Education provides for women the opportunity to be able to read and write as well as do some arithmetical calculations.

- iv. It provides them the opportunity to acquire some specialized training for occupational competence leading to personal fulfillment and social contribution.
- v. Their intellectual horizons are expended to a great extent.
- vi. Education via school can serve as an agent of upward social mobility for women.
- vii. Educating women will help them to cope with the complexities and challenges of the modern world – i.e. of science and technology.

Furthermore, Salawu (1989) quoting Adalaregbe (1972) identified the purpose of women's education as follows:

- i. To develop the total personality
- ii. To enable them adapt to society and make a contribution to life
- iii. To prepare young adolescents and adults to be able to cope with domestic work and family life and;
- iv. To development in the social economic and political sophistication in their ability to understand, participate in and contribute to their community (p. 35).

In the light of the invaluable importance of women education the provision of basic education therefore becomes a fundamental right of every child and adult. There should be no discrimination on the ground of sex or genders. It is a fact to assert that an educated housewife, mother or career woman can be a better housewife, mother and citizen. Looking at women as mere childbearing machines and cooks is old fashion and should be discarded (Salawu. 1989). Generally speaking girls and women should be seen as partners in progress hence they should be accorded equal opportunities for education.

### **The Way Forward**

In order to address the problems of girls and women education, more efforts need to be taken. The benefits of education for women cannot be overemphasize. The prospect of women education are not only limited to increase in productivity education is capable of playing, a fundamental role in improving the status of women, improve household health and nutrition. In view of the enormous benefits of girls and women education, and the problems associated

with their education the following measures are recommended with a view to finding a way forward to the long time problem.

- i. Enforcing existing laws prohibiting hawking and street trading by girls with penalties stipulated for contrary behaviours.
- ii. The re-launching of the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E) is commendable, however, the factors that affected the last programme should be identified with a view to making amendment with particular emphases on gender issues.
- iii. More rural based research should be carried out to identify the causes of girl-child drop out in school. There should be broad and well-articulated policy to take care of continuing education for those who dropped out. In other words facilities should be expanded for "Second Chance" functional and literacy education to adult women.
- iv. Government through community power structure should ensure that girls complete their schooling. In addition, the public enlightenment campaign should be intensified to increase the awareness for the need and value of education by parents and the society at large.
- v. There should be educational provision for women with special needs, the gifted and handicapped, nomadic women, women in Pudah (Kulle), women in the reverine areas, career women and market women. All these with a view to maximize the participation of girls and women in education.
- vi. School should be more accessible for girls and women especially in such areas where they do not exist.
- vii. There is the need to improve the quality of teachers, in particular through increasing the number of female teachers, gender awareness in teacher training and in service training for teachers.
- viii. Development of more relevant curricula for girls and women considering the modern needs and challenges.
- ix. There is also the need to change community attitudes towards girls and women education through participatory approaches. This means that parents and communities should be involved in planning management decision-making and advocacy efforts on girl-child education process.



## **Conclusion**

A great number of factors are affecting the development of girls and women education. These problems ranges from socio-economic, cultural and many others. Government has made various attempts to improve the situation, yet more need to be done. The value of women education for personal, social and national development cannot be over emphasized. Women should be seen and recognized as partners in progress and the development of this nation. Hence they need to the sensitized, mobilize and above all be educated.

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