

Women Education in Nigeria: Predicaments and Hopes

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ABSTRACT

This paper is focused on women education in Nigeria. It traces the genesis of western education in Nigeria and bias that existed from the traditional Nigerian society against women education. It identified and discussed barriers to women education in Nigeria. Recent trend in enrolment at various levels of education shows improvement in favor of women. In view of this realization, this paper argues that if the current momentum is sustained, women will not only achieve equal status to men in educational attainment but also have the tendency to surpass men within the next ten to fifteen years. The implications could be outreaching as the paper proffers some recommendations.

Keywords: Curriculum; Gender; Western Education; Nigerian Women; Discrimination

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, inadequate access to education has been identified as one of the main barriers holding back the advancement of women. Education generally is concerned with the imparting of knowledge in people. Etesike and Ogugua (2005:181) posits that education describes the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, valuable skills developed and faculties trained. They maintained that through education, one generation passes onto the next, its knowledge and wisdom and that education frees one's mind thereby allowing one to think beyond what one is told.

In traditional African societies, women education was regarded as a waste since they are not expected to participate in formal work activities outside the home. They were seen as silent workers, keeping the home, bearing and rearing children and helping their husbands in the farm. The UNESCO (1998) report on the state of education in Nigeria, classified the role of women in traditional society as follows:

- Rearing of children
 - Taking care of domestic chores
 - Providing water and firewood
- There are also societal prohibitions on women in the following areas:
- Ownership of familial lands especially when the women do not have a male child.
 - Women also not allowed participating in village councils or in chieftaincy matters.
 - There is obvious gender bias against women in variety of Nations' sporting activities.

The coming of colonialism and Christianity did not help matters. Adeniran (2007) observed that with the disempowering colonial ideology of "domesticity" as espoused by the practice of women as home makers, provided the basis for women's educational imbalance in parts of Africa.

However, emerging realities especially since the 20th century has revealed the need for women education and empow-

erment. Following this need recognition, several efforts have been made especially by women themselves to draw world attention to the plight of women. Obasi (2006) recalled that international conferences organized specifically by women and for issues affecting women include the one in Mexico 1975, with 133 countries in attendance; Denmark, 1980, with 11,300 delegates from 145 countries; Kenya, 1985, with 1,000 delegates. Beijing in 1995 drew about 6000 delegates as well as that of New York in 2005.

All these efforts have started yielding positive results as could be noticed in the educational enrolment in recent years by women. With the current trend sustained, women will not only achieve equal status with men in area of education and employment but also over take men in the nearest future

2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

One theory which has remained prominent as regards women education and empowerment is the "Women In Development" (WID) theory. WID approach emerged in 1970s and was adopted by the United Nations Agencies such as UNDP and World Bank. It was based on the idea that education leads to economic development and therefore advocates for inclusion of women in economic and educational policies as a means of achieving women empowerment. WID approach holds that there is relationship between education and employment in the formal sector as education helps women to acquire skills which enable them to secure employment. WID approach has led to policies and strategies which resulted in granting women equal access to education and participation in paid employment

2.1 Women and Education in Nigeria

The introduction of western education in Nigeria dates back to pre-colonial years and was done by the missionaries. According to Olujuwon (2011), formal education in Nigeria was under the control of Christian Missionaries between 1842 and 1881. St Andrew's College Oyo, Hope Waddel Institute Calabar and the Baptist Training Centre Ogbomoso, were among the first set of schools set up to train teachers. These institutions provided the much needed leadership in the production of Primary school teachers in Nigeria.

Anugwom (2009), posits that the missionaries venture in education was borne out of the desire to use the school and its curriculum to reinforce church doctrine. Hence, such schools at that time were largely pious, parochial and restrictive both in curriculum and organizational principles. The need to meet the country's manpower requirement led to the intervention of the colonial government in education. Abdullahi (1990) cited in Olujuwon (2011), pointed out that the various efforts of missionaries and the colonial government towards the early development of teacher education in Nigeria are note worthy and are as follows:

1. The Colonial government became more interested in the development of education in general by enacting enabling laws and policies in order to give direction and clear government responsibilities for education.
2. Professional standards and appropriate curricular for training of teachers were set up by both missionaries and the colonial government education officers.
3. Education of youths was no longer limited to the southern part of Nigeria. In the northern part similar centers for training of teachers were established in order to encourage education of children.

Good as these efforts were, Salami (2002) observed that there were identifiable shortcomings inherent in the system of education offered by the missionaries then. Commenting on education in colonial times, Gaidzwanwa (1992), asserts that domestic education as enshrined in the ideology of women as primary home makers which was a social engineering initiative designed to create suitable wives for indigenous colonial employees further disempowered women socially, and economically. In a similar fashion, Ukeje (1966) had earlier noted that the educational system put in place by the colonialists was divorced from the life of the people as it emphasized aspect of education with little contribution to development.

However, since Nigeria independence in 1960, successive Nigerian government have made several efforts aimed at repositioning Nigerian educational system and ensure women access to both formal and informal education. These efforts include the adoption and ratification of international conventions and instruments. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place all the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women (Ciroma, 2006). Some of these international conventions operational in Nigeria include:

- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)
- African protocol on people's rights and the rights of women (APPRRW)
- Convention on the rights of the child (CRC)
- Millennium development goals (MDGs)

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Specific provisions are made in these documents concerning women education. For instance, article 10 of CEDAW (1979), which concerns women's right to education, requires measures to ensure same opportunities for women as fore men in access to programs of continuing education including adult and functional literacy programs, especially those aimed at reducing the gap in education between men and women.

Article 12 of APPRRW (2003) is on right to education and training. Paragraph 1 (a) of article 12 provides that "states parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and guarantee equal opportunity and access in the sphere of education and training. Paragraph 2 of article 12 provides as follows:

States parties shall take specific positive action to:

- a) Promote literacy among women
- b) Promote education and training for women at all levels and disciplines, particularly in the fields of science and technology;
- c) Promote the enrolment and retention of girls in schools and other training institutions and the organization of programs for women who leaves school prematurely.

The UN convention on the rights of the child (CRC) adopted by heads of government at the UN world summit for children in 1990 was ratified by Nigeria in 1991 and domesticated in Nigeria through the child's Rights Act of 2003. According to UNICEF (2003), Rights protected by the child's Rights Act include "Right of a child to free, compulsory and universal primary education"

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also makes demand for education for all by 2015 and gender equality and women empowerment. The Nigeria national Gender policy also has targets aimed at improving women education in Nigeria. According to Ciroma (2006), the policy is aligned with relevant regional and international protocols and instruments such as the Beijing platform for Action (B.PF.A) New partnership for Africa's development (NEPA), A.U. solemn declaration for Gender Equality, African protocol on people rights and the right of women (APPRRW) the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), international conference on population development plan of action (ICPD POA), NEEDS/SEEDS, the millennium development goals (MDGs) and a wide range of sectors.

The national gender policy, like the MDGs has objectives and targets relating to women education. For instance, objective 2, target (a), aims to "Establish and strengthen appropriate educational, training, institutional and operational frameworks that link the macro-policy environment effectively with the micro level where women, men and communities are experiencing the manifestation of gender equality by 2010".

Objective 7, target(a) is to "guarantee equal access of women, men girls and boys to both formal and informal education and skills development opportunities through special programs and initiatives by 2015" (National Gender policy 2006). Despite all these provisions, women have not been able to achieve equal status in education in Nigeria due to several barriers.

2.1 Barriers to Women Education in Nigeria

The EFA report (2003/2004) shows that historically edu-

cation in sub-Saharan Africa and even Asia was initially made available only to males. Offor (2006) agrees with this report by saying that in pre-colonial and colonial era, opposition to western education was greater for girls than boys because parents and guardians believed that women education began and ended in the kitchen. Unfortunately this opposition did not end with the colonial rule. As observed by Nmadu (2000), the Nigerian society (pre-medium and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices. Onyemunwa, (1998), Oghiator, (2005), and Achunine (2005) in their separate studies, also observed that women are victims of culture and tradition.

Several factors according to Bamidele (2011) still affect women education negatively. They include:

a) Religion: Some religious sects in Nigeria still believe and teach that women shall not acquire western education as seen in the Boko Haram sect in northern Nigeria.

b) Illiteracy among parents and guardians: majority of parents and guardians in some parts of Nigeria are illiterate and hence, do not know the importance of education let alone investing in it. Recent data released by the chairman of national population commission, Samaila Makamma, revealed that literacy level among parents and guardians in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria are as follows:

- South-West 73.6%
- South-South 71.9%
- South -East 74/1%
- North -West 33.8%
- North East 33.8%
- North-Central 54.9%

What this implies is that the literacy level in North West and North East combined is less than what obtains in any part of the South.

(c) Poverty: Many Nigerian families are still living in object poverty. According to Wikipedia encyclopedia online (2011), 45% of Nigeria population still lives below poverty line. This implies that out of 155 million people (2010 estimate), over 69 million are still straggling to meet their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing and can not afford to pay for education.

2.2 Trend in educational enrollment in Nigeria schools

The 2009 social statistics data published by the National Bureau of statistics shows that there is a significant increase in the female enrollment figures at three levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) between 2004 and 2008. The figures are presented in the tables below:

Table 1: Primary school Enrollment 2004 - 2008

Year	MF	F	F %
2004	21395510	9571016	44.73%
2005	22115432	9926359	44.88%
2006	23017124	10441435	45.36%
2007	21632070	9948567	45.99%
2008	21294517	9810575	46.07%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Social statistics 2009

Table 2: Total secondary school enrollment 2004 - 2008

Year	Total	F	F %
2004	6279462	2739754	43.63%
2005	6397343	2854718	44.62%
2006	6536038	2893167	44.26
2007	6068160	2608014	42.98%
2008	6625943	2943802	44.43%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Social statistics 2009

Table 3: Total enrollment in adult literacy education centers in Nigeria by gender 2004-2008

Year	MF	F	F %
2004	961,669	446,410	46.42
2005	926075	403506	43.57
2006	1035,860	439,377	42.42
2007	1,858871	846128	45.52
2008	1,129365	568,687	50.35

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Social statistics 2009

Table 4: Total Enrollment in Nigeria Colleges of education by sex. 2003/2004 - 2007/2008 session

Year	MF	F	%
2003/2004	328156	179068	54.57%
2004/2005	355560	207479	58.35%
2005/2006	245693	129359	52.65%
2006/2007	255926	122999	48.06%
2007/2008	225362	118025	52.37%

Source: National Bureau of social Statistics: Social statistics 2009

Table 5: National Teachers Institute (Distance Learning) Student Enrollment by Gender 2003/2004 - 2006/2007

Year	M/F	F	F %
2003/2004	29276	17082	58.35%
2004/2005	29449	17730	60.21%
2005/2006	23693	14352	60.57%
2006/2007	23567	14487	61.47%

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Social statistics 2009

Table 6: Total enrollment of students in Nigeria Polytechnics 2000/2001 - 2004/2005

Year	Total	F	F %
2000/2001	180395	72612	40.25
2001/2002	259450	103736	39.98%
2002/2003	285345	115698	40.55
2003/2004	226682	85260	37.61%
2004/2005	311844	126162	40.46

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Social statistics 2009

As can be observed from the data presented above, there is a steady increase in female enrolment at various educational levels in the country. In the primary, it moved from 44.73% in 2004 to 46.07% in 2008. At the secondary level, it moved from 43.63% to 44.43%. Adult literacy also witnessed up ward increase from 46.42% in 2004 to 50.35%. At the polytechnics level, it started with 40.25% in 2000 and dropped to 37.61% in 2003/2004, but picked up in 2004/2005 to record 40.46%. At the college of education, except in 2006/2007 which recorded 48.06%, other years showed that female enrollment stood above 50%. Similarly, enrollment at the National Teachers Institute distance learning program showed

that females dominated males with 58.35% in 2003/2004 to 61.47% in 2007/2008 session.

3.0 Implications to Nigerian Education

The implication of the above success in female enrollment is that if the current momentum is sustained, women will not only achieve equal access to education with men, but also overtake men. The same thing is also likely to happen in the formal employment sector, so long as educational attainment remains the standard for judging one's eligibility for formal employment.

A new paradigm is likely to evolve with the potential to destabilize the social fabric of the traditional norms of Nigerian culture. The challenges of men adapting to new roles of home-makers may not augur well in a men dominated culture.

3.1 Recommendations

1. Men should be encouraged to continue to enroll in career paths leading to teaching in Nigeria's tertiary educational sectors.
2. Courses or new curriculum ought to be developed that could expose learners on the impending cultural shift in Nigerian education.
3. Women studies will also need to be fine tuned to accommodate new roles as women are now likely to dominate the workforce.
- 4.

3.3 CONCLUSION

Education inequality between male and female in Nigeria has remained a perennial issue, since the introduction of western education in Nigeria. Achievement of equal status in educational attainment by men and woman has continued to be elusive. This is due to many factors ranging from faulty educational system to cultural and traditional practices that are inimical to women education. However, emerging realities have shown that efforts towards improving women education in Nigeria is yielding positive result giving hope that the skewed education imbalance between men and women will be reversed within the next 10 to 15 years if the current momentum is sustained.

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