

Gender Inequalities, Access to Education and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focuses on gender inequalities and access to education. A 3 – section, 10 item questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents comprising of literate and illiterate individuals in the society. Section A comprises of respondents bio-data, section B contains 10 items and C provides space for the respondents' opinion that may not have been listed in section B. The responses were collated and the common opinions are as summarised below:

- 1. Girl children will finally find themselves in their husbands' houses so there is no need placing them on a strong footing education.*
- 2. Girl children are not always interested in science and technological based courses which are now the order of the day.*
- 3. Girl children have phobia for scientific enquiry and discovery.*

It is therefore suggested that girl-children have to be encouraged to take up challenges with their male counterparts in order to be relevant to the contemporary society. Illiterate parents should be educated and literates be encouraged to allow their girl – children good access to education. Government should provide free and compulsory education for girls up to university level.

keywords: Gender Inequalities Assess, Education, National development

Introduction

Education has been defined in various ways by different educators depending on their perception of the concept. To the authors, education could be seen as the most powerful instrument for developing and empowering the citizens to master their social and natural environment. It is the sum total of the development of an individual's physical, social, mental and emotional well being. It is all the experiences of the individual through which knowledge is acquired and the intellect enlightened. Education, Science and technology are working together. In fact their impact cannot be dismissed for the achievement of national goals and objectives and betterment of living.

Access is seen in relation to the number that enrolls in proportion to those in that specific age bracket. Although, educational opportunities have indeed greatly expanded for students in Africa and other nations, there is still an under-representation and achievement widened to the growing disadvantage of females in a large number of African states. The acquisition of formal education has made it possible for the Nigerian women, to contribute their quota to nation building and development. Whatever their educational status, they are expected among other things, to play the role of mothers, wives and home makers. As mothers, the Nigerian women are expected to produce children and bring them up in conformity with norms and values of the society. As wives, they are required to take care of husbands, to encourage, support and assist them in their task of taking care of the family. As wives, they are expected to be asset to their husbands and not burden. Also makers, they are expected to create conducive atmosphere in the home so that their children can develop their fullest potentials and bring out the best in their husbands.

Women as mothers are the best teachers. By words and examples they train children. From then the children (both male and female) glean the first ideas about goodness or badness, gentleness or harshness, truthfulness or falsehood, honesty or deceit, humanity or foolish pride. In the words of Ndalolo (1999) almost all societal ills are placed at the door step of misguided, ignorant, poor and retrogressive motherhood. Women are breeders of children, feeders of families and providers of stability, comfort and happiness in the home, states and consequently, the nation as a whole.

The Need for Girl-Child Education

Education develops one's personality, self esteem and self confidence. An educated girl acquired a sense of personal efficiencies and belief in her ability to manipulate her environment. Education is regarded as a human capital because it equips one with knowledge and skill to participate in economic activities. Ayoola (1997), in discussing the purpose of education in Nigeria, stated that, the purpose

of education which should be the same as the national purpose is to create a good society and good life for all its members, and to use all the intellectual and moral resources man has developed and all resources he is capable of developing in the pursuit of this goal. The ideals in Ayoola's ideas fall short of the Nigerian situation because, not all its members are carried along equally in educational opportunities.

As a mother, educated girl-child is more able to adapt strategies which maximize the life chances of her children by taking decisions in the marital, reproductive, economic and medical centres. An educated girl/child, when married, is more likely to provide a healthy diet, seek proper medical help and follow medical advice in the treatment of her children leading to low infants and child mortality. Educated girl-child who is a product of social change herself is better equipped to socialise her children to survive in the new socio-economic order.

The educated woman is more likely to improve the capacity of life for the children by allocating more resources (energy, time and money) for them. She is likely to provide a healthy diet, seek proper medical help, and follow medical advice in the treatment of her children leading to lower infant and child mortality. She is more likely to purchase educational goods and services for her children. An educated woman who is a product of social change herself is better equipped to socialise her children to survive in the new socio-economic order committant with development. Ndalolo (1999) lucidly put it that education does not only prepare the woman herself to participate in the development of her country. It also enables her to prepare her offspring for participating effectively in the society. This is why it is often said that when you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you are educating a whole nation.

Parents and their Attitude to Girl-Child Education

Gender simply means being a male or female and gender roles imply ways in which man and woman have different roles and responsibility in different culture. In Africa, birth of female child is always with mixed feelings. It is believed that girl-child is a "visitor". She will leave for the husband's house. Often times, when the child is a girl, the husband and relations tend to be nagging. Some people will not congratulate the woman who had gone under the rigour of pregnancy and child labour. The mother and the girl-child are not entitled to the father's inheritance. Many mothers of girl-children have been abandoned for the problems that are not of their own making. Education of girl-child has always been held with levity because people believe girls are of weaker sex without stamina, can easily be lured into sexual act, cannot face challenges and at the end of the day, will leave her father's house for another man's house. Some girl-children are left to learn family trade or go for apprenticeship for fear of being impregnated while going to school. If girls are sent to school, they are restricted

to take higher courses that do not require many challenges. Girls are found in courses like Home economics, teaching, languages and so on. (Garrett, 2009)

Relevance of Girl-Children to the Development of the Society

An adage says train a girl and train a nation. Education of girl that will become a mother is mandatory in the development of the nation. An educated girl will not rush into marriage until after her education. Such girl-child must have undergone training from primary school through the university. She is trained in various disciplines to contribute her quota to the workforce and the economy of their community and the global society. (Ololube & Egbezor, 2012)

An educated girl, that is married, will be a home maker, knows the type of medical attention needed in the home, food to give to her children and the school her children should go. An educated woman will make sure that her child/children attend(s) school regularly and even engage them after school. Nowadays educated girls are competing with their male counterparts in fields like medicine, law, politics accounting and others and they performing well and sometimes better than their male counterparts. They sometimes do better than men because of their diligence and gentle nature. Girl children education is relevant because they can attain higher positions to correct some erroneous belief that girl education ends in the kitchen.

Female Child and Technologically Based Courses

It is always a common misconception that males are known to perform better in technologically related courses than female. Durnell, Glissor and Siann (1995) in their Scottish study found out that girls and women were confident users of computers, despite their initial hesitation. There were so many studies that attested to the fact that girls and women undervalue their abilities in the area of technology. For example, Spertus (1991) and Cottrell (1992) were of the view that gender stereotyping contributed to differences in confidence and male dominating computer games. According to Plunket (1997), 80% of the software segment is designed for boys while only 20% is for girls.

Male dominance and harassment have not allowed females to be effective in technological related courses. At times, males may equally feel that when females participate in technology they threaten their males' identity. Wajeman 1991 submitted that excluding and rejecting women from technology reveals that it is not for them but for men, thereby consolidating relations among them. Although roles undertaken by women are always devalued

Relevant Examples of Female Achievers in the Global Society

According to Amaele, (2008)., the following are some women of substance who can be recognised as examples of achievers. This will avail the various

governments the opportunity to support equality among male and female children.

JORGE, Sonia

She has a master degree in public policy and BA/BS Economics and Business Finance (University of Massachusetts). For the past 12 years now, she has been involved in reforms involving telecommunications.

MARCELLE, Gillian

Her career in telecommunications began in 1998. For the past 14 years, she has been so active in ICT and telecommunications. She was chosen as one of the members of the high level panel that advised United Nations on ICT and development issues

MIJUMBI, Rita

She is a project manager for development services in Uganda. She is a member of the Uganda Development Gateway working group. She once worked as project officer for the international development research centre in Uganda. She has master's degree in Entrepreneurship development and Management.

PAI, Young- Joo

She has been involved in the management of women's information resource center in Korea. She got her Ph.D in library and information system in Korea

RAMILO, Chat

For the past seven years, she has been specializing in gender, information and communication technology and women's electronic networking.

SEYE SYLLA, Fatimata

She has a baccalaureate in mathematics. She has a master degree in science with a first University degree. She equally has a post graduate management degree from the African regional school in Dakar. She attended many training sessions in computer science, computers in education and other internet related areas. She was identified to have conducted research in ICTs use in education.

Late Professor Dora AKUNYILI

She was a professor and former Minister for information and communication under the headships of late President Alhaji Musa Yar'adua and President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan

Dr (Mrs) Sarah ALADE

She is currently one of the Deputy Governors of Central Bank of Nigeria.

Okonjo Iweala Former Minister for finance during Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure her achievements are laudable. She is currently the finance Minister and coordinating Minister of Economy in President Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

Other women of achievement in Nigeria include;

Hajia Turai Yaradua (The wife of late Alhaji Umaru Musa Yaradua) who took laudable steps in moving Nigeria forward and improving the plight of women.

Mrs Jonathan the wife of the current president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Erelu Olushola Obada the former Osun State Deputy Governor and former minister for state defence in President Goodluck Jonathan's administration.

Mrs Oyinlola, A woman of insight the wife of former Osun State governor

Prof. (Mrs.) Alele Williams formerly Vice-Chancellor University of Benin

Prof. (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe formerly Oyo State commissioner for education

Prof. (Mrs.) Aize Obayan former Vice Chancellor Covenant University Ota

Prof. (Mrs.) Oyatoye (Rtd from University of Ilorin)

Prof. (Mrs.) Sidikat Ijaya Director, Institute of Education, (Academics) University of Ilorin

Prof. (Mrs.) E.O Omosewo Head, Department of Science Education, University of Ilorin

Prof. (Mrs.) Modinat Funsho Salman University of Ilorin

Dr. (Mrs) Olaseinde Williams Director, Centre for peace and strategic studies, University of Ilorin

Dr. (Mrs) Raheemat O. Oloyede (Zonal Coordinator JAMB Kwara and Kogi)

Problems of Gender Inequality

Female students tend to drill into or are guided towards areas of study regarded as 'Females' fields, examples are teaching, nursing, library, arts and secretarial studies which are considered as female occupations. It is either they shy away or get discouraged from areas like engineering, medicine and others. The result is that in the labour market, women end up in the low paying, low status job regarded as the traditional, less productive and less important for development.

Maabovy and Jacklin (1974) contributing to sex stereo typing, stated that women are assumed to be small, weak and with scattered brain, among all, she is not expected to be a great surgeon, pilot, long/marathon race sprinter, perform energy requiring job or do subjects that require special ability but rather ones requiring verbal attitude like secretariat job.

From the opinion polls conducted, parents laid emphasis on the training /education of male children than females, that there are always more female children than males in families.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following questions were asked and answered ;

- (1) Are girl-children interested in science and technologically based courses?
- (2) Are parents willing to train their girl-children to University level?
- (3) Are girl-children interested in taking up role challenges?
- (4) Can traumatic experiences discourage girl-children continuing their education?

Table 1

General assertive statements of parents on girl -child education

Responses	Male	Female	No response at all
Girl-children are not interested in science technologically based courses	89	111	-
Some parents are not always willing to train their girl-children	69	105	26
Girl-children are always lazy, not ready to take up role challenges	79	100	21
Parents laid emphasis on education male children than females	98	102	-

Source: Fieldwork

From table 1, the 200 parents who responded to section 3 of the questionnaire felt that girl-children are not scientifically and technologically inclined. Moreover it was their submission that some parents are not always willing to train their girl-children. This may be as a result of the previous interaction with section B, table 1. Furthermore, they believed that girl- children were equally lazy and were not ready to take up role challenges. The responses of parent did not differ much on

the traumatic experience of male and female children.

There are other factors listed why girl children should be willing to go to school and why, in opinion they should not be educated. These too show that there are variant opinions about educating girl children.

Parents (Literate/Illiterate) who felt girl children should go to school are futuristic. They felt that even if it does not pay them now, they will take care of them during old age. Other submissions include.

- (1) Girl- children normally have time to visit parents at old age.
- (2) Girl- children always have the foresight about what to do for parents/siblings.

Those who felt that girl- children should not be educated stated amongst others that;

- (a) when they marry they may not project the family's name again.
- (b) they will always focus on their husbands and children.
- (c) girl- children have phobia for scientific enquiry and discovery.

Different ways of Attaining Gender Equality in Education

Government should provide free education to GIRL-CHILDREN at all levels with emphasis on science, mathematics, technology and vocation than the situation is, at present. This is necessary so as to be able to contribute their own quota in these areas.

- (i) There should be a quota of at least 10-20% specifically for admission of women into tertiary institution for courses in which female students are currently marginalized. This will increase the number of female students going for such courses.
- (ii) Training areas and procedures that can influence female participation in planned ways should be identified and pursued by Ministry of Education and Women Affairs Units at State and Federal tertiary institutions
- (iii) Parents, community leaders and public officials should be sensitized on the importance of educating girls.
- (iv) The women folk themselves should be up to liberate themselves from the jinx of this enslaving gender factor
- (v) Secondary school girls should be encouraged and rightly counselled to pursue technological, scientific and vocational career like their male counterparts.

- (vi) The women folk should reject the feelings of inferiority complex which have created the subjugation syndrome in them and make themselves visible in the field of technology, by their contributions.
- (vii) Women should see themselves as active agent of development rather than household goods. Because a person's self concept will determine its struggling for achievement.

Once the above are considered, the girl-children will have the courage to forge ahead.

Conclusion

Girl children have to be encouraged in all facets of life to be up and doing and compete with their male counterparts. Both literate and illiterate parents should encourage their girl-children, love them so as to reach the top and be recognised in the society. The women folk in all professions should rise up to the challenges of girl child education, fight for their course so that they will equally enjoy good education since the national policy on education is in support of equal educational opportunities then it connotes that the girl-children should be allowed good access to education. The government (federal, state, local) should make education of girl- child free and compulsory and they should be gender sensitive in selection to posts institutions and positions so that they would be encouraged.

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