



EDUCATION AND REGENERATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES IN NIGERIA

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and
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CHAPTER FIVE

**REFLECTIONS ON
SEX DISCRIMINATION AND
WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

D. S. Adekeye

Abstract

Sex discrimination is one of the oldest forms of discrimination and it is universal. It has its roots in the differences in human biology of male and female. Such discriminatory practice often cut across all aspects of human activities. This paper examines the sources and effects of sex discrimination on women educational attainment in Nigeria. The formal education of women in Nigeria has lagged behind that of men due to the problem of sex discrimination. The backwardness in women education is thus responsible for their low participation in political activities and labour market. It then concludes with strategies towards curbing the problem of sex discrimination. Some of these measures include programmes of cultural re-orientation and enactment of stringent laws against this practice.

INTRODUCTION

Sex discrimination constitutes one of the problems of gender relations in many societies. According to Ojie (2002:58), this problem is universal and has its roots in the differences in human biology of male and female sexes. The male sex is usually stronger physically than the female sex. Man may have acquired his dominant position through the use of those superior forces.

A close examination of gender relations in Nigerian society reveals a lot of discrimination against women. The women experience gender inequalities simply because of their status of belonging to the female gender. The discrimination in Nigeria like in other African societies, starts right from the womb where expectant mothers discovered by traditional practitioners to be with baby girls are subjected to certain behavioural and food taboos in the family. Girls in some traditional Nigerian societies are denied even the simple right to existence in the minds of their fathers who are the family heads (Annan-Yao, 1998). This is an indication of male child preference, with its detrimental effect on the girl child in the family. Women are equally being discriminated against in the labour market, in politics, in health and educational sector.

An examination of the educational system in Nigeria shows a great disparity in male and female educational levels in the country. It should be pointed out here that the gap between male and female education that had its roots in primary schools, becomes even more manifest at the secondary and tertiary levels as a smaller proportion of girls are able to transit from primary to secondary and tertiary levels. Female dropout becomes more acute, as a result of adolescent girls' environmental hazards, such as early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, gender insensitivity to girlchild education and lack of encouragement from the wider society.

The thrust of this paper is to reflect on the effects of sex discrimination on the educational attainment of women in the Nigerian society. Apart from the introduction, the paper is divided into the following sub-sections: conceptualising sex discrimination, theoretical framework, sex discrimination and women educational attainment, conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualising Sex Discrimination

One is born as either a male or a female; this is sex and it is biologically determined, permanent or unchangeable and given (Awopegba, 2004: 471). In distinguishing between sex and gender, Kabeer (1990) notes that an individual is born into the category of male or female through a biological process and then becomes man or woman through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. Gender is a cultural construct hence, roles are differently assigned across cultures by societies. According to Awopegba (2004: 471), what is acceptable as "male" or "female"

work differs from one society to another, but sex, which is biologically determined, is unchangeable. Sex characteristics are determined in the womb right from conception.

Discrimination based on sex has its root in the differences in human biology of male and female sexes. Early philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have recognised the woman's "inferior" physical endowment. Specifically Aristotle opined that women have "natural defectiveness". The Holy Bible says that "the husband is the head of the wife" and enjoins wives to be "subject to their husbands". (Ephesians 6: 22-23) These views had their advantages of enhancing law and order in the society. However, sex discrimination has reached a level, in some societies, that women have been reduced to almost mere slaves or instruments to be used by men. It is incontrovertible that there are many women geniuses who could do better than most men (Ojie, 2002: 58). Therefore, it could be argued that sex discrimination is a hindrance than a blessing to a society.

Theoretical Framework

A number of competing theories have emerged to pose some interesting questions to gender imbalance. Some of these theories include sex role theory and stratification theory.

Sex Role Theory

Oakley (1972) emphasizes the extent to which housework is part of feminine gender roles. One of the basic occupation, in particular, that of housewife is exclusively feminine and housework is also treated as feminine. She discussed the variety of skills and responsibilities lumped together under the heading of housework and argued that the non-acknowledgement of housework as work is both a cause and a reflection of the lower status of females in society. Most societies prescribe different activities and characteristics for male and female, usually perceived as natural by the people concerned. This way the fairly limited range of biological differences between males and females are compounded by culturally prescribed gender role differences.

According to Parsons (quoted by Zanden, 1993), the nuclear family in the modern industrial society specializes in two basic functions. The socialization of the young and the stabilization of adult personalities. Female's personality in the family prepares them for femininity, while their education reinforces the sex division.

Stratification Theory

Stratification arises from the division of labour, whereby certain roles are favoured more than others, members of the society are judged according to the role they play and according to how the role is carried out.

Females have been characterized as inconsistent and emotionally unstable

or as having low intelligence. In addition, they are perceived as being weak when compared to the men. In this regard, a combination of factors among them high--social visibility, ascribed characteristics, rationalization of status, accommodative behaviour and discrimination are held to account for the understanding of many aspects of the position of females in the society.

Social scientists are interested in two aspects of conflict: (1) how conflict relations permeate and shape all aspects of human interaction and social structure to social life and (ii) how conflict or other theoretical perspective helps to educate the genesis and escalation, or de-escalation and outcome, and consequences of inequality, uprising and revolutions.

In relation to sex discrimination, conflict theories contend sexual division of labour as a social vehicle invented by men to assure themselves of privileges, prestige and power in their relationship with females. By relegating females to the home, men have succeeded in denying females those resources they need to succeed in the larger world.

Several explanations have been given by conflict theorists for sex discrimination; some explained that the motivation for sex discrimination emanates from economic exploitation of females' labour. Some opine that the fundamental motive is men's desire to have females readily available for sexual gratification. Others however, emphasized that the stratification of females is not for copulation alone but for procreation, especially to produce male heirs and daughters who can be used as exchanges for current political and economic alliance with other families (Zanden, 1993).

Some Comments on sex Discrimination and Women Education

The estimated population of Nigeria in 2001 was 116.6 million (FRN, 2001), making the country the most populous in Africa. More than fifty- percent of the population of Nigeria (i.e 60 million persons) is made up of women and girls (Obanyan, 2003:45).

Various studies have established a strong relationship between sex discrimination and academic achievement of women. According to Ojie (2002:58), the formal education of women has lagged behind that of men for so many reasons, including sex discrimination. In patrilineal society men invariably remain in the extended family to maintain the family lineage. They are regarded as prime members of the family and are sent to school to be educated in order to keep up the family's name. Women move to the family of their husband at marriage. They are seen as not of great importance to their family of birth. Investing on their education is regarded as a waste of money.

Discrimination against women in education is still practiced in many parts of Nigeria, particularly the northern parts. Many of those who attempt to go to school are usually given out for marriage even before the end of their primary

education, while their male counterparts continue to attain higher levels of education. This attitude to women education due to discrimination is most inimical to the development of the families and the basic social structure in the society. The result of this lopsideness in education between men and women is that few women will become empowered and participate in the labour force, especially in teaching in our higher institutions of learning. In 1990, a simple head count showed that there were about 27 female professors in the country compared with 1,500 male professors. In other words only 1.8 percent of professors in Nigeria were women (Akande, 1996). The main reason adduced for this position of women is that the number of women who benefited from higher education is generally less than those of men. Table 1 shows the disparity between male and female educational attainment.

Table I: Nigeria: Regional and Gender Difference in Adult Literacy Rates

Zone	Females	Males	Average
South-East	60%	74%	67%
South-West	55%	74%	64%
North-West	22%	40%	31%
North-East	21%	42%	32%

Source: UNICEF (cited in Obayan, 2003:45).

Primary Education: The primary school enrolment shows that there is a lot of gap between male and female enrolment in schools. Table II shows that the gender gap of total enrolment in primary school was 19 percent in 1993 and dropped to 10 percent in 1996. This decline could be attributed in part to the mobilization and advocacy campaigns mounted by the federal, state and local governments in collaboration with donor agencies; non-governmental organizations and the media on girl-child education.

Table II: Primary School Gender Gaps (National)

Years	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Gender Gap	17	16	16	18	17	14	10

Source: Statistics Division, Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja

Secondary Education: It is important to mention here that the gender gap between male and female enrolment that started in primary school becomes more pronounced in the secondary school, the percentage of girls that transit from primary to secondary is usually small. Some of the reasons that account for the low percentage includes early marriage, unwanted pregnancies, gender insensitivity to educational enrolment and lack of encouragement from the wider society. Furthermore, curricula exclusion practices, which tend to scare girls away from mathematics, science and technology become more intense.

Table III shows that there were 22,141,964 pupils in junior secondary schools in Nigeria in 1997, and that some 47% of these were girls. The table also shows that thirteen states: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Anambra, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, and Rivers had achieved gender parity in junior secondary school enrolment. Thirteen other states:- Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kabbi, Nassarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara were still far from attaining gender parity, while the remaining states struck the balance.

Table III: Junior Secondary Enrolment, 1997			
State	Male	Female	Total
Abia	39,028	50,617	89,645
Adamawa	45,645	10,498	56,143
Akwa Ibom	39,311	45,853	85,164
Anambra	27,804	54,447	82,251
Bauchi	22,298	13,402	35,700
Bayelsa	8,468	7,138	15,606
Benue	49,868	33,458	83,326
Borno	26,923	16,100	43,023
Cross River	18,093	21,655	39,748
Delta	34,927	42,545	77,472
Ebonyi	14,860	13,114	27,974
Edo	31,215	33,311	64,526
Ekiti	14,156	13,238	27,394
Enugu	32,282	40,452	72,734
Gombe	19,956	9,644	29,600
Imo	24,622	33,794	58,416
Jigawa	11,376	3,810	15,186
Kaduna	42,581	33,755	76,336
Kano	39,105	27,797	66,902
Katsina	24,759	15,115	39,874
Source: Obayan (2003)			

Table III: Junior Secondary Enrolment, 1997 (cont'd)

State	Male	Female	Total
Kebbi	13,697	3,691	17,388
Kogi	33,948	26,714	60,662
Kwara	31,973	27,690	59,663
Lagos	108,625	116,617	225,242
Nasarawa	24,473	12,027	36,500
Niger	23,782	16,867	40,649
Ogun	68,113	63,042	131,115
Ondo	20,109	22,795	42,904
Osun(1996)	56,858	51,368	108,226
Oyo	79,301	81,399	160,700
Plateau	40,324	33,256	73,580
Rivers	31,867	31,931	63,798
Sokoto	15,167	5,950	21,117
Taraba	16,216	7,429	23,645
Yobe	50,721	6,520	57,241
Zamfara	10,873	1,871	12,744
FC.T.	12,117	10,613	22,730
Nigeria	1,173,641	1,041,323	22,141 964
	(53%)	(47%)	
<i>Source: Obayan (2003)</i>			

The situation at the senior secondary schools level is illustrated by the information provided in Table IV. The information helps to explain the beyond access' dimension of gender inequality at the Senior Secondary school level, a point further emphasized by the examination success rates attained by girls.

Table IV: Summary of SSCE Results, 1985-1992

Subjects	Male Enrolment%	Female Enrolment%	Percentage of Male with Credit	Percentage of Female with Credit
English Language	58	42	5.7	3.6
Mathematics	58	42	7.9	3.5
Physics	73	27	15.6	6.4
Chemistry	63	37	13.3	5.6
Biology	56	44	9.3	5.4
Agricultural science	63	37	9.14	7.4
Economics	56	44	16.6	9.9
Government	58	42	23.1	12.2
Geography	71	29	22.5	6.2
History	58	42	21.7	14.5

Sources: *Adapted from Oyeneyin, Salau, and Ayodele (1999)*

Higher education: That the gender gap that began in the primary school has become a gender gulf at the tertiary level as illustrated in the statistical reports of the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for 2000/2001 academic year, which indicate that 42.5% of applicants for admission into Nigerian Universities (198,819 out of 467,490) were females. However, of the 50,277 admitted, only 19,006 (37.8%) were females. Female candidates were very low for Engineering courses (12%), but relatively high for courses in Administration (49.6%).

However, a relatively high proportion of females secured admissions into faculties of Arts (57.7%) and Education (55%). For the other faculties the percentages of females that sought and secured admissions were: agriculture (42%), engineering (16%), law (39%), medical sciences (39%), the pure sciences (39%), and the social sciences (35%).

That fewer females apply for entry into Universities is as a result of fewer girls completing higher secondary education. Furthermore, that a smaller proportion of female applicants (as compared with male applicants) succeed in gaining admissions is a reflection of girls' relatively lower success rates in the senior secondary certificate examinations (Obayan, 2003: 49). These factors according to Obayan, have a direct impact on the status of females in society. Only a small proportion of them have access to post secondary education, and consequently only a very tiny proportion do get into those

commanding heights' of national life for which higher education is a pre-requisite:

The African Development Report (1999) graphically illustrated the decline in the proportion of Nigerian women in the labour-force which stood at 29.7% in 1980, reduced to 28.0 in 1990 and 14.3 in 1994 (Osunyikanmi, 2000:14).

Table V: Gender Distribution of Employed Persons in Selected metropolitan Areas in Nigeria, October 1998 (%)

Town/Area	Female	Male
Aba	43.8	56.2
Abuja	37.2	62.8
Ibadan	48.7	51.3
Jos	34.5	65.5
Kano	12.8	87.2
Lagos	43.1	56.9
Port Harcourt	40.3	59.7
Maiduguri	21.0	79.0
All selected areas	39.5	60.5

Source: National Manpower Board (1998)

Concluding Remarks

The discussion so far has brought to the fore the effect of sex discrimination on education of women in Nigerian society. To remedy the problem of sex discrimination and improve women education in Nigeria, it is therefore apposite to make the following recommendations:

1. Every institution of the society must endeavour to bridge gender gap in education and skills acquisition drive. With more of higher education, the effects of a number of religious and cultural limitations will be minimized and by extension, build the much needed bridges across gender disparity.
2. Relevant government functionaries should conduct gender analysis of development programmes and projects to ensure that they do not render women powerless. Development activities must be gender-sensitive.
3. Both public and private sector employers should eliminate all forms of salary and benefit inequalities based on sex differences.
4. There is need for a stringent law against sex discrimination in Nigerian educational sector. This will be in line with the millennium development goal which advocates parity in gender education by the year 2015.
5. There should be cultural re-orientation towards equality of persons, irrespective of sex.
6. Advocacy by government and non-governmental organizations should include sensitizing people that men and women education are vital to the development process. Government should domesticate the provisions of the international conventions on sex discrimination, being a signatory to it.

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