

Impact of Gender Equity in Education and National Development in Nigeria

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DOI: 10.56201/jhsp.v9.no2.2023.pg1.13

Abstract

Gender equity in education generates a push force that accelerates progress across sectors and goals; thus national development. Gender equality constitutes central position in both national and international programmes as an accelerator for achieving development. Women's place in national development appears subordinated. Thus, this study examined gender equity in education in Nigeria and the impact on national development. Specifically, the study sought to determine the degree of women access to education, ascertain the impact of women education on socio-economic development determine the factors that constitute barriers to women education in Nigeria, the consequences of low women access to education and benefits of gender equity and women in education. The study discovered that educated women serve as stabilizing factor in national development and recommended 'cultural rebirth, smart economic, new education content and soft competition technique' as the approach that will grant women the needed equity in national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gender Equity, Women education, Impact, National Development, Education*

Introduction

Beyond the legal semantics of gender equality, Nigeria and any other developing country treading the path of development are expected to demonstrate realistic gender mainstreaming in access to education. Gender equity in Education is not just a privilege but a fundamental right of every Nigerian child. Hence, individuals are legally guaranteed to have access to education irrespective of sex, race and religion. According to Idiong,S.P(2023), the significant progress in education of so many countries is possible through the wings of their intellectual capacity. Gender equity in education is value laden because it drives sustainable global and national development. Education opens door for enhancement capacity and potential needed for people to succeed and to contribute to societal and national growth. Therefore, in the real sense of it, “governments ought to make gender equity in education part of their value system and not to prioritize it because priorities can change at any time but values do not. Values and beliefs drive culture and behaviours” (Mehnert, 2019). In Nigeria gender equity in education intersects with other factors such as ethnicity, socio-economic status and geographical location. According to Amadeo (2019), there are two dimensions to equity in education: first is fairness, this implies making sure that personal and social circumstances are not obstacles to achieving educational potential. Examples include gender, socio-economic status, or ethnic origin. The second is inclusion, this implies to ensure a basic minimum standard of education for all. For example, everyone should be able to read, write, and do simple arithmetic. However, Mehnert (2019) stated that “gender equity is not just a social issue; it is a massive economic opportunity. Secondly, gender equity is not a synonym for women’s rights. It is for both men and women. Gender equity therefore is “the process of allocating resources, programmes and decision-making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex and equally addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females” (CAAWS, 2019).

The concept of gender equity recognizes that women and men have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances between the sexes. This may include equal treatment, or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (CAAWS, 2019). In the context of this study, gender equity is a means while more access to education by women is the end and development is the outcome. Gender equity in education does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities guaranteed by equal education are obtainable not depending on whether one was born male or female. Even when there are differences, it should not be equated with inferiority or superiority (Eister, 2017), for no human is less of the other. Therefore, women education is defined as the education that would make a woman become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her to become functional in society (Afebendeughe in Ugwu, 2001).

Women education is synonymous with women empowerment. According to Aja-Okorie (2013), an educated woman is an empowered woman and more marketable in terms of employment; better employment implies more earnings for the family as well as improved wellbeing all of which contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth. The Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004

succinctly acknowledged education as an instrument of parity for excellence in national development. In 1971, the United Nations gave the following as factors for national development: equal living standard for all, equal share of all in profit, similarly equal distribution of income and capital, expansion of facilities regarding education, health, shelter and social welfare and preservation of the environment (Pamnani, 2013). National development in the context of this study is the mobilization and articulation of the human resources potentials in Nigeria through education irrespective of gender and exploiting them for the wellbeing of all.

More access to education by women is a necessary condition for women empowerment and national development. It will enable more women to become socio-economic, cultural and political change agent of our nation. According to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the United Nations Population Fund-UNFPA (1994), capacity-building efforts should pay particular attention to the needs of women in order to ensure that their skills and experience are fully used in decision-making at all levels which implies that the education and contribution of women to global and national development is indispensable. To undermine that in any development process amounts to an unsustainable development. That's why the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (4) target by 2030 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Throughout history, the central role of women in society has ensured the stability, progress and long-term development of nations. According to Roy (2019), for every 10 per cent increase in gender equity towards parity, there is a 1per cent to 2 per cent increase in revenue. Unfortunately, gender equity in access to education is still a debatable issue across the globe. Women had remained on the sidelines of socio-economic operations of Nigeria despite huge efforts to streamline gender equity in education; hence the goal of this study is to examine gender equity in education and its impact on national development in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender equity: this implies the differences in the needs and abilities of women and men as equal humans. These differences are identified and addressed in a manner considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, opportunities and access.

Women education: is the education that empowers a woman for self-awareness, self-reliance and functionality in society.

Impact: this involves having a strong effect on national development.

National development: this is the mobilization and articulation of the human resources potentials of a country through education irrespective of gender and exploiting them for the wellbeing of all.

Education: is the process of acquiring knowledge or acquisition of skills, understanding and experiences for the development of individual both mentally and physically.

Theoretical Framework

Women In Development (WID) approach and Family-Nation Theory are the two theoretical background used in this study. Women in Development approach calls for greater attention to women in development policy and practice, and emphasizes the need to integrate women into the development process (Reeves & Baden, 2000). According to Akubuilu & Omeje (2012), 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 inclusion of women in economic and educational policies as a means of achieving women empowerment.

Family-Nation Theory stated that every nation is a cumulative of families. Every child is a product of a woman, who will later become an adult. The adults will later become contributors to the economy either positively or negatively. That will be much from the initial family influence. Women are at the center of family development and by extension national development. The family being the first point of civilization, the contribution of women at this stage of the nation is of great impact to the State. Any government that wants a prosperous and progressive country must prioritize education particularly that of women as equal partners to men in National development. As such, gender sensitivity has become an indicator of a civilized or developing nation

Method of Study

The study made use of triangulation research approach. This involves the use of multiple data sources for the study. The study relied on secondary sources of data, primary data obtained from the University of Nigeria Academic Planning Unit and statistical and qualitative descriptive analysis of the data.

The Level of Women Access to Education in Nigeria

Globally, women account for about two-thirds of the world's 774 million illiterate adults and there has been no change in reducing this share since 1990 (UNESCO, 2014). To that effect, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in 2008 equally observed that gender disparity was largest in the rural areas and poor households. The nature of these rural areas and poor households, and the current general insecurity are part of the fundamental reasons for variation of data on gender and women education in Nigeria. That notwithstanding, there are reliable statistics that show acceptable data on women education in Nigeria.

According to National Bureau of Statistics -NBS (2016) Nigeria population in 2010 is estimated at 193 million people, women constitute 49.2 per cent and men 30.8 per cent, sex ration remained 102 men to 100 women, etc. According to (NPC, 2009) in (British council (2014) 40 per cent women and 28 per cent men have never attended school. The Net Enrollment Rate at primary school level is 56 per cent for girls and 61 per cent for boys (UNESCO, 2014). For National Bureau of Statistics (2016) in (UNESCO, 2014) the percentage of girls' enrollment in primary school was less than 50 per cent, it was 48.6 per cent in 2014 but decreased in 2015 and 2016 to 47.4 and 47.5 respectively, the completion rate for girls in primary, junior secondary and senior secondary for 2016 were 64.8 percent, 38.9 percent and 33.2 per cent respectively, literacy rate among young women and men aged 15-24 years in 2016 was 59.3 per cent and 70.9 per cent respectively.

According to World Bank Education Data (2013), the number of girls enrolled in primary school increased from 79 per cent to 92.3 per cent between 2008 and 2013. Enrollment of boys also rose from 89 per cent to 95.2 per cent, continuing to remain slightly higher than that of girls (Dunn, 2018). In 2008, 64.1 per cent of girls and 75.3 per cent of boys completed primary schools, in

2010, the figures rose to 68.9 per cent and 78.4 per cent respectively (Dunn, 2018). Despite the above estimated progress made, the Federal Government through the Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Education, Adamu Hussaini disclosed in 2017 that 10.5 million children were out of school (BBC, 2017). However, the Executive Secretary, Universal Basic Education Commission, Hamid Bobboyi argued that the number of out-of-school children had increased from 10.5 million to 13.2 million, between 2010 to 2015. The United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) in 2018 estimated that 69 per cent of the children are in Northern Nigeria, just as 60 per cent of them are girls. According to Adamu, those mostly affected were girls, street children and children of nomadic groups. He stressed that economic prosperity can only be achieved with an “inclusive and functional education system”. It is believed that government funded schools in Nigeria have practically collapsed over the years because of poor funding, leaving children from poor homes with nowhere to go but the streets.

Further estimation on girls/women access to education in Nigeria is shown in the tables below:

Table 3.1: Distribution of Enrolment of School-Age in Primary Education by Year and Sex

Year	M	F	% F	% M
2014	13,255,789	12,545,408	48.6	51.4
2015	13,393,310	12,049,225	47.4	52.6
2016	13,435,940	12,155,241	47.5	52.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2016)

Table 3.2: Distribution of Enrolment in Junior Secondary School by Year and Sex, 2014 - 2016

Year	M	F	% F	% M
2014	3,311,470	2,891,624	46.6	53.4
2015	3,260,109	2,920,182	47.2	52.8
2016	3,181,810	2,786,332	46.7	53.3

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2016)

Table 3.3: Distribution of Enrolment in Senior Secondary School by year and Sex, 2014 - 2016

Year	M	F	% F	% M
2014	2,321,183	1,971,306	45.9	54.1
2015	2,629,526	2,281,418	46.5	53.5
2016	2,417,192	2,058,117	46.0	54.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2016)

Looking at the percentage differences in male to female enrollment in Junior and senior secondary schools, the lowest percent difference is the (2.8 per cent) in Table 3.1 of the primary school enrollment. The highest is (8.3 per cent) in Table 3.3 of the senior secondary school enrollment. The range of the differences of male to female is (5.5 per cent) indicating that the gap between women and men in education is not widening.

Increased participation of women in the education sector is also visible at the University level. When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, only 7.7 per cent of Nigerian University students were female. By 2001, the number had skyrocketed to 41.7 percent and it continues to rise. In 2009, 45 percent of all university students in Nigeria were females (Dunn, 2018). According to Okebukola, Chairman Governing Council, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) it is gratifying to note the increasing number of enrollment of women in NOUN, second semester registration indicated 58% of those taking examination in NOUN are female (Odunsi, 2019a).

Table 3.4 Total Number of Undergraduate Student Enrolment and Graduate Output as at 2011, 2012, 2013, AND 2015, 2016, 2017, UNN

Undergraduate Enrollment			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2011	12010	9370	21380
2012	14480	12063	26543
2013	13461	11801	25262
Total	39,952	33,234	
Postgraduate Output			
Year	Male	Female	Total
2015	6105	8805	14911
2016	3431	4751	8182
2017	2025	1643	3668
Total	11,561	15,199	

Source: Academic Planning Unit, UNN

Table 3.5 Students' Enrolment in Nigerian University By Sex (2017)

Category	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Total
Female (%)	43.9	37.6	43.1
Male (%)	56.1	62.4	56.9

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2018)

The implication of the preceding data, from primary to university is that while gender parity may not have been achieved in education in Nigeria, the disparity between male and female is not widening. That is to say that the effort of government and non-state actors like Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE) is yielding positive results except in areas with peculiar challenges like the boko haram insurgency in the northern part of the country.

Another significant indicator in Table 3.4 is the graduate output for female. In 2015 and 2016, female graduate output was more than the male by 5.1 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively. Some social and economic indices such as peer pressure within the context of dating, partying, cultism and indigence had been identified to influence male undergraduates more than female undergraduates during their years in the university. However, the sum of the difference in female graduate output for 2015 and 2016 (5.1 per cent +1.6 per cent) i.e 6.7 per cent is equal to the male difference in 2017. This shows the likelihood of achieving gender parity in education in the long-run. For the world Economic Forum, it will take 170 years to reach gender equality globally (Roy,

2017). As shown in Table 3.5, the students' enrolment of undergraduate and Postgraduate as at 2017 by percentage is 43.1% for female students and 56.9% for male students. This shows the increase in male students than female in Nigerian University.

The Impact of Women Education on Socio-economic Development in Nigeria

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status are essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and indeed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning (FWCW, Beijing, 2005) in (United Nations population Fund, 1994).

According to Newiak (2018), for Nigeria, we have conducted specific analysis to show that if Nigeria reduced gender inequality both in the labour market and in political representation in education, in legal rights and also by improving health outcomes for women, the economy could grow on average by as much as 1.25 per cent points or more. Just to put it in context, the 2017 growth outcome of the economy showed that it grew by 0.8 per cent, in that context, 1.25% points on average is large.

Since the return of democracy in Nigeria, i.e, from 1999 till date, the impact of women Ministers of Finance have shown that educated women can hold the ace for national development as much as the men, if given a level playing ground. Of the seven ministers of Finance between 1999 to date, four are women and the reform introduced by one of them has successfully curtailed financial corruption and linkages in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government. The reforms outlived the administration that introduced them and have been maximally applied by successive administrations irrespective of political party affiliation. According to Isa (2019), in the face of losing huge funds to ghost workers through unsubstantiated salary wage bills, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 2007, under the watch of former Minister of Finance, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala introduced two information technology driven payment mechanisms- the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), for budget management and accounting in the public sector. Also introduced as part of the reform measures across MDAs for prudent financial management was the Treasury Single Account (TSA) of which its implementation took off in 2015. From April 2007 when these reforms were introduced and February 2018, over 288 Billion Naira was saved as a result of the difference between the amount government would have released to MDAs and the actual amount released through IPPIS payment scheme (Isa, 2019).

According to the Accountant General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris, the Federal Government between 2017 and 2018 has saved N273,809,842, 071.99 on the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) platform, monies that otherwise would have been lost to ghost workers and leakages (Agabi, 2019). The AGF further noted that prior to 2015, the total number

of Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) on the IPPIS platform was 288 with a total staff count of 235,858, but as of today the total MDAs on IPPIS platform is 561 with a total staff count of over 755, 422. This robust and magnificent development in the wage bill system of the federal government is the unquestionable contribution of a female minister to the National Development of Nigeria. Since 1999, till date there seems to be no other obvious reform that has cut cost, curtailed financial theft and promoted public accountability that transcended administrations beyond political party lines.

There are other notable contributions of women in other fields but to mention a few. History will not forget the likes of Dora Akunyili for her well known fight against counterfeit drugs and unsafe foods in Nigeria. She brought revolutionary change in the food and drug industry when she was appointed Director General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Likewise, Ameyo Stella Adadevoh who sacrificed her life for Nigeria when she identified Partrick Sawyer, Liberia National as a carrier of deadly Ebola Virus and successfully prevented him from having contact with anyone outside the walls of First Consultant Hospital, Obalande, Lagos (Pulse.ng, 2017). Her brevity and sacrifice prevented the spread of the deadly Ebola virus in Nigeria. Girl child education has a considerable influence on the society, resulting in earlier and more empowered children. Nseabasi and Offong (2019).

Specifically in education, in 2018, Folawe partnered with Kaduna State Government to place teachers in high need primary schools across the State. To that effect, 38 fellows were mobilized and currently serve as full-time teachers across 22 public primary schools in Kaduna State (Olowookere, 2018). Edufun Technik, a pro-female education organization, is focused in STEM education for children and youth from 3-18 years old in underprivileged and underserved communities in Eastern Nigeria, and also ensures that 60 per cent of their students and clients are girls. Currently Edufun Technik has covered over 500 classes of STEM curriculum since 2014, trained 1, 200 pupils and 2, 100 students in after-school STEM workshops and in-class activities (Ugwu, 2019). Edufun Technik trained five Nigerian girls who won Junior Gold at the 2018 Technovation World pitch in Silicon Valley, Sanfransisco, United States. Record has it that the Forum of African Women Educationists (Nigeria) attracted partnership with Microsoft to train 360 girls on IT skills, life skills and coding skills and champions' the Girl Centre Initiative (GCI) in Nigeria.

Factors that Constitute Barriers to Women Education

From existing literatures, there is a plethora of barriers to women education such as poverty, religion, socialization, insecurity, culture, etc. This paper would like to emphasize briefly on the culture, and attitude of government towards education in Nigeria.

i. Culture: The cultural belief about women in Africa as men's chattels, who should be heard and not seen beyond the family front, is a fundamental barrier to women education. For instance, the belief that a girl child born into a family is in transit and her final destination is the husband's family is a major cultural barrier. It is for this reason that the male children who are considered the heir are usually better equipped for the future through education and other necessary means. This may not be the case of the educated and wealthy families who educate their girl child. However, the cultural limitation still manifest, in the organized socio-economic and political systems of our

society in which women are usually seen to play the second fiddle to men. The effect of culture on women education in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, is complex. Complex in the sense that generally, culture appears to limit women but there are specifics with regard to region, tribe, etc. In Northern Nigeria, which is dominantly Muslims, education is yet to liberate the women as much as their counterpart in the south who are dominantly Christians. In the North, there is no separation between culture and religion but in the south it exists. Culture reinforces religion and when there is no separation between the two, it constitutes barrier to education especially when it is not a civilized culture (Mahdi, 2011 in British Council, 2012) & (Abdulkarim, 2009 in British-Council, 2014).

ii. Government attitude towards education: How civilized, modernized, liberalized or developed a society/country is, is a function of education, particularly that of women. Government attitude towards education has the capacity to either sustain the already existing barriers or whittle down their effect to create a gender balance in education and bring about national development by liberating women through education. According to Rotimi Amaechi, Minister of Transportation, liberating the society will help reduce the level at which women face economic challenges (Odunsi, 2019b).

The general attitude of government towards education, expressed through budgeting, is not encouraging and does not demonstrate the fact that education is the basis of all civilization. According to Iyoha (2019), the annual government budget is a mirror into the culture of a country. Budgetary allocation for education in Nigeria has continuously fallen below the 15-20 per cent minimum of the entire budget recommended by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Nigeria in 2017 budgeted N550 billion (i.e, 6 per cent) for education; in 2018, it was N496.9 billion but it was later raised to about N605.8 billion (i.e, 7.04 per cent) by the National Assembly. Incidentally, the budget was later cut as part of the virement for the Independent National Electoral Commission to prepare for the last general elections (Ameh & Aluko, 2019). In the 2020 budget of N9.45 trillion, education is expected to be allocated N652.94 billion, representing 6.9 per cent of the budget (Adamu & Osagie, 2019). According to the National Chairman of the Academic Staff Union of Universities, Biodun Ogunyemi, education budgets indicate the ruling class in Nigeria do not prioritize education (Ameh & Aluko, 2019). A cursory look at the education budget in Nigeria indicates that it sometimes reflect the perception of the regime involved or the idiosyncrasy of the man at the helm of control.

Consequences of women's low access to education

- i. Population Explosion:** The 10.5 million out of school children are all given birth to by women and the ratio of the women to the children was not given. If the 10.5 million children are not cared for, by educating them, the girls among them in the nearest future will become women and the chances of repeating the cycle are glaring. The implication of such is grave for Nigeria. The population explosion of such class of people will have inherent socio-economic consequences on the country. Soon, the rich won't be able to sleep because the poor, homeless and angry are awake (Jannah, 2019 & Opejobi, 2019).
- ii. Anti-state sentiment:** When the Nigeria State is unable to improve the condition of poor women and children through education, the State indirectly builds anti-state sentiments against itself by a cohort with unimaginable consequences. There is no doubt that the 60 per cent of

the 10.5 million out-of-school children from the north are girls and as well vulnerable to recruitment by the Islamic insurgents.

Benefits of Gender Equity and Women in Education

1. Though Nigeria has not achieved gender equality in education, yet the disparity between male and female education is not widening. The gender parity in education could be achieved in the long run and this if achieved will lead to national development.
2. More female graduate output irrespective of more male undergraduate enrollment had been attributed to male peer pressure (dating, partying and cultism) and indigence.
3. There is a growing consciousness to expose the females early enough to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics-STEM for competitive advantage in the labour market and contribution to national development.
4. Poverty reduction: Prioritizing women education by the government will serve as a short-cut to poverty reduction. It is self-empowering and the economic impact will rub off on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) especially for the fact that women constitute 42.9 per cent of the population of the country.
5. Population control: Women education and the consequent awareness enable women to control birth processes and thereby engender population control for adequate and sustainable development.
6. With education, women serve as stabilizing factor in national development. According to Olayemi (2013), Nigerian women have proved to be more than mere bench-warming spectators even in the midst of the male dominated professional congregation.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

As evidence has shown in this study, it is obvious that unlike in the past more women as of today have access to education though with the exception of the rural and urban poor. However, the challenge remains giving them equal opportunity or a level playing ground with men in terms of application of knowledge acquired in the public sphere for national development. This depends on the extent of Government gender sensitivity. On the whole, increase in gender equity in education will result in corresponding increase in public revenue and guarantee the stability of the economy. Deriving from the findings, the study recommends thus:

1. **Cultural Rebirth:** This involves educating our women and re-educating our men about women as equal stakeholders in national development. This can be done through the introduction of gender studies in all levels of our education system.
2. **Smart Economics:** Today, reaching sustainable development is no longer feasible without smart Economics. Smart economics is the practice of taking women into consideration in every government policy as equal stakeholders in the plan and execution of national development plans and programmes.
3. **Education with “New content”** – Education as handed down to us by the colonial system should be done away with. We need a transformed education system that is consistent with our social, economic and cultural realities; that relates to the life, needs and aspirations of Nigerians, thereby making it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of personal, group and national goals. Such education system should be driven by entrepreneurial, scientific and technological

innovation, which will produce free, independent and productive women for over-all national development.

- 4. Soft competition technique:** Soft competition technique is the use of emotional intelligence and soft skills within the spectrum of professionalism to gain leadership advantage through performance both in private and public spheres. These skills are not gender inherent, they are developed and whoever masters them sets the pace for others to follow. Emotional intelligence comprises personal and social competences. Personal competence is made up of one's self-awareness and self-management skills. Social competence is made up of one's social awareness and relationship management skills (Bradberry, 2014).

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