

WOMEN EDUCATION FOR SELF-RELIANCE: RELEVANCE AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

A brief look on the position of women in the past may help to give a clue to why much emphasis is on women education in the present day Nigerian society. Education still remains the panacea for self reliance for every woman in the Nigerian society. This paper attempted to explain the meaning of women education and identified areas in which education can achieve self-reliance for women. These areas include social status, cultural value, economic development, importance of childcare, political awareness, national unity and national reconstruction. It discussed the relevance of women education in Nigeria as a means of women becoming aware of themselves their potentials and their abilities to exploit their environment. Challenges facing women education were high-lighted to include wide spread of poverty, religious and cultural restrictions, ignorance and negative attitude; social beliefs and fear, early marriages and teenage pregnancies, and government failure in the provision of fund, qualified personnel, appropriate statistics, inadequate provision of infrastructure and facilities and lack of supervision of programmes. Finally, probable solutions and strategies were suggested to help solve the challenging problems facing women education in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Women education existed in Nigeria before the coming of the Europeans. This was the traditional education which had well-established systems in the society. This education was part of the culture of the people and took place within the environment where children grew up. Ngwu (2006) reflecting on the traditional systems of education pointed out that the education started in the houses where interpersonal communication skills were taught, in the villages where group process and skills were learned, in the farms where they learned vocational skills and methods of agriculture, in the age grade sets where social communication political skills and knowledge were acquired, in the market where economic and marketing skills were learn. Thus, learning was a part of life in every traditional society.

Years back, women in many cultures were seen completely as one who has no place in the family and community, but only where there was domestic work to be done. Women were seen as other people's property or relative, who when eventually married to some other places, become other peoples relatives (Njoku 2006) A woman is seen as an object of man's pleasure, a child factory, a cook and soon. They were only taught formally by their mothers or elderly women who in most cases talked only of marriages and domestic duties but never schooling. Hence in recent times there is a great outcry for formal women education.

What is Women Education

The Federal Government of Nigeria in her National Policy on education (2004) defines education as the process that helps to develop the whole man physically, mentally, morally, society and technologically. It has to be mentioned that this process does not exclude women. Thus, women education can be seen as a process which creates opportunities for all round development.

Atebedeugbe (1996) explains women education as that education which make women become aware of themselves and their capacity to exploit their environment. Women education also involves the training in literacy and vocational skills which enables women to be functional member of the society. Here, education of women refers to formal education which involves schooling. It equips one with the knowledge, abilities, skills and values to understand the world around her in order to function meaningfully in any environment she find herself.

Women education is seen as an avenue of women liberation. According to Ezeani (2006), Women education is a means of women liberation from cultural, social and political oppression. Education therefore serves a means of women liberation from all forms of barrier to employment to

leadership positions: to participation in politics and as means of empowerment for women.

Women Education and Self-reliance

The importance of women education cannot be over estimated. Women education have some specific purpose. Omololu (1972) identifies seven different purposes of women education to include changes in vital areas of a women's life:

Social Status, Cultural Value, Economic Development, Realization of the importance of childcare, Political Awareness, National Unity, National Reconstruction.

1. **Social Status:** Education changes the social status of a woman in terms of social class, economic empowerment, respect and recognition give to her in the society. Her education lifts her above her illiterate counterparts.
2. **Cultural Value:** Education makes a difference in the behaviour of an educated woman. She is cultured knowing how to behave herself in difference situations and circumstances. She is confidence, polite, gentle and respectful. An educated woman is able to control her temperament depending on circumstances. An educated woman cannot fight in the market places or shout or misbehave in public places.
3. **Economic Development:-** Here lies the power of women education. An educated woman is economically self-reliance. She can obtain a good job, fare well in business and be financially able to carry out some duties in her family. Apart from contributing to the family, an educated woman stands a better position economically to contribute to the development of her' community, state and the nation at large.
4. **Realization of the Importance of Childcare:-** Educated women make better mothers than the illiterate one. Children from educated women stand better chances of getting the best education and health care. Their children's needs are provided adequately and at the appropriate time.
5. **Political Awareness:** Education exposes women and makes them politically liberated. Educated women recognize their political rights and are able to fight for positions in work places, community and in the nation politics. Today women are in many elective positions in Nigeria politics as a result of their education. Women no longer rely on men for their political ambitions. They come put to contest for position and aspire to be voted into political offices.
6. **National Unity:** - The educated women realize themselves as members of a nation where they should make impact. They see the nation as an entity whose unity must be preserved. Joining other women associations both at community, state, ethnic and national levels with the sole aim of preserving the unity of the nation. Some of these associations cut across ethnic and religious boundaries thereby fostering national consciousness and national unity.
7. **National reconstruction:** Education enables women to contribute their quota towards national development. Through several developmental programmes educated women in Nigeria today have contributed to the development of Nigeria as a nation. Some of such are Better life for Rural Women, family support programme, family economic. Advancement programme.

Relevance of women Education

The education of women is a kind of investment in human resources which will yield enormous benefits for the individuals, the family and the society at large. But in years past in our country Nigeria, women were not encouraged early enough to pursuer and participate in formal education. Interestingly education is the means to political socialization and indispensable tool to life fulfillment.

Educated Women in the Nation have been able to use their potential to complement the roles of their male counterpart in the nation. In most professions today, women are holding top positions. Eboh (1999) pointed out that women are now found in all professions which were considered to be exclusively for men. Today a growing number of women are doctors, layers. Directors, chairmen of Boards of Government Council, University Chancellors and vice chancellors. In the business sector of the Nigeria economy, women are making their impact. Women own the fastest growing segment of small, medium and large business organizations. An example in Nigeria is one of the biggest

pharmaceutical industries owned by a women - Emzor pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., Isolo Lagos.

Today women hold top positions in government. According to Eboh (1995) women ministers and commissioners are found in our federal and state sectors all over the country. This an evidence to the relevance of women education Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iwala was the Power Finance Ministers. In the education sector, Nwafor Orizu, was the provost of College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State and the Executive Secretary National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) and Prof. Alele Williams was the Vice Chancellor of the reputable University of Benin and host of other women too numerous to mention.

Investment in women education tends to perpetuate its relevance. According to Maduewesi and Maduewesi (2006) they opined that the more educated a mother is, the more likely her children particularly daughters, are to pursue their own education successfully. They further asserted that an educated woman makes a better mother than her uneducated counterparts. Maduewesi (2005) opined that an educated women is able to understand and appreciate her children's needs, able to make informed decision about their discipline and able to help her children with school work. Added to the above, an educated woman is equipped to practice hygienic living habits in her home. She promotes better understating in living standard as a result of her education.

Education specialists hold the view that female teacher like mothers in the family tend to exercise more care on pupils / students. Educated women in the teaching profession are like their nurses in hospitals are seen as indispensable tools in the school system.

Education of women empowers them and makes them become fully aware of their potentials and allows them to realize their potentials to the fullest. Education equips the women with the knowledge, abilities skills and values to understand the world around her in order to function meaningfully in any environment she finds herself. According to Okoro (2002) skill acquisition by women will promote the overall economy of the nation, going by the fact that women make up more than half of the nation's population. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (1975), reported that African women supply 70% of the work in food production 100% in food processing 50% in animal husbandry and 60% in marketing.

Otoli (1992) noted that women who have acquired relevant skills perform better roles as citizens through the cultivation of better attitude to life and work. One positive effect that women education in skill acquisition for women will have according to Okoro (2002) is that it ensures that the women possess some saleable skills. They can become highly productive in the society, Thus, their opportunity of securing meaningful jobs or becoming self-employed becomes much higher. Okocha (1999), noted that in effect, skilled women become useful human beings both at home and in the society. Okoro (2002) in his findings discovered that a nation can only survive if its citizens (men and women) are adequately equipped to meet the moral, scientific and technological challenges of the modern technological age.

According to Uzoigwe (1993), vocational education given to women is aimed at improving the welfare of the individuals, families and societies at large through their cultivation of basic scientific approach and the development of skills necessary for survival for the purpose of teaching functional literacy philosophy to the women.

Knowledge is power as people say, women need to be educated and trained for the acquisition of knowledge and power. Therefore, it is pertinent that women education be provided to women so that they may effectively be able to train, instruct and edify other people to meet their goal in life women who have gone through formal education eventually develop confidence, stability and strong personality that makes them contribute their quota to the society.

Educated women tend to appreciate the tenets of the culture and respect for the laws of the land. Tobotndip (2003), opined that women are better custodians of culture than men. This implies that educated women will be better custodian of the culture of their society. The culture of the society would be transmitted and presented from generation to generation.

Women are victims to many social vices like prostitution and human trafficking due to ignorance. Azikwe (1992) contended that women after acquiring education. Skills and training through education may never be timid and gullible. Furthermore, Tabotnadip (2003) asserted that the education of women would reduce to the barest minimum, child abuse, child trafficking, drug abuse and an educated mother is a defense to her home.

Again, the women of yesteryears are not that of today. The world is moving at a very rapid rate with the emergence of technology. Hence the women need education to keep pace with the present change in order to build the future.

Challenges facing women education

There are many traumatic problems facing women education in Nigeria. Ezeani (2006) and Akujuo (1989) had identified these problems to include home background, religious and cultural restrictions, social sanctions, early marriage, economic factors. Other problems are teenage pregnancy, and non-challant attitude of government towards women education.

Wide spread of poverty among families especially in Rural areas:

Most families in rural areas of Nigeria are peasant farmers, farming only to sustain their families without much financial supplies. In such cases the women folks are denied access to education. Very many people in Nigeria live on a very low income. Consequently, even in the face of free education, some families may not be able to provide books, uniforms, transportation and other school requirements..

The above problems lead to the issue of 'no money' boys first. This implies that boys were preferred to girls. It is a mockery of womanhood. In families boys were picked to go to school to acquire education while girls were left at home to care for their younger siblings and perform house chores.

Religious and cultural restrictions:

Akujuo (1989) identified religious injunctions *affected* women education more in north than in the south of Nigeria. For instance marriage, and religious injunctions, which are the aftermath of koranic teachings are more rampant in the north. This deprived the women of education in line with the *pudah* practices, which make women have less access to higher education. This limits their capacity to compete for jobs in higher positions of authority and power.

Ignorance and negative attitude

Some families up till now see no reason to educate a female child. They see it as wasteful. People believe that education gives women enhanced status and much exposure. Still to some families spending money in educating a woman is a waste since eventually, when she is married, she becomes another family's property. Instead the women should be married off early enough and get whatever education from their husband's house. This is a reality today, considering the numerous numbers of women in our weekend and sandwich programmes pursuing high education after marriage.

Social beliefs and fear

According to Delemont (1996) there was the fear that a woman might become sterile if she become educated since education would deny her of early marriage. This made it difficult for educated women to get married after graduation. This constituted hindrance to women education. There was also the problem of fear that educated women may not perform their domestic work because of the out come of women education. This fear stemmed from the people's belief that there would be breakdown in social system if women were educated. They felt that educated women would refuse to perform their traditional roles in the home of cooking and caring for children. It was also feared that most educated women would not submit to the man as the head of the home as required by religious and traditional beliefs and norms.

Early marriage and teenage pregnancy

This is another area of hindrance to women education. Many girls are given out in marriage at very early age. This denies their access to education. On the other hand, teenage pregnancy hinders women education. A pregnant teenager writes herself off from the school system and the chances of being educated. These two are real obstacles to women education in our nation.

Non-Challent Attitude of government towards women education

The government is also an obstacles to the progress of women education in Nigeria. According to Ugwu (2001) the government should be held accountable in problems of poor funding, lack of reliable statistics, inadequate personnel, uncoordinated services and lack of facilities for women education.

No programme of education can succeed without adequate funding. Until now Nigeria has not implemented 26% of the annual budget to be for funding education. Since education is not properly funded, it affects all the various commission under it. Osinulu (1994) pointed out that the National Commission for Education in 1990 received only about twenty - two percent of it's allocation from the government. The poor allocation affect women education.

There can be no effective planning without accurate statistic. The popular education programme in education UPE 1976 failed because of lack of accurate statics. The popular education programme in education UPE 1976 failed because of lack of accurate statistic. Women education programme suffer the same fate. A complete success is not possible since there is no accurate statistic to be used in the supply and provision funds and facilities. In most women education centres in Nigeria, the government do not have accurate statistic for effective and efficient management.

Most of the women education centres have no manpower to carry out the required duties. In most cases, the personnel are not qualified or with few qualified teachers. The government is not concerned with the practices going on in these centres. There are no monitoring teams for supervision therefore some of the centers are just existing and this non-challent attitude of the government do not help the functioning of women education.

Closely related to the above factor are the uncoordinated services in women education programmes. Ugwu (2001) stressed that the different bodies charge with the management and co-ordiantion of women education programmes apparently operate parallel organizations. They operate in such a way to satisfy their selfish interest thereby contributing to the collapse of women education in Nigeria. The programmes are poorly handled due to unwholesome attitude and lack of commitment of the coordinators of the women education programmes.

Inadequate provision of facilities and infrastructure is another problem bedeving women education programme. Ugwu (2001) listed the needed facilities and infrastructure to include electricity, buildings motorable roads, to women centers, good water, books and other teaching and learning facilities. Some of the women education centers are not centrally located this hinders access to these centers and most women education centers suffered lack of students whom these centers use established for and the objective is therefore defeated.

Probable Solutions and Strategies

Self - determination should be encouraged among the women. They should be exposed in order to make them aspire to greater heights.

Access to school is very important. There should be awarensss on the need to educate girls by sending them to school. There has to be close monitoring and counselling to keep them in school.

Persistent negative reports about girls should be avoided especially victims of early pregnancies. Girls who got pregnant while in school should be sent back to school and after delivery and no negative reports should be made about them.

The issue of 'no money' 'so boys first' should be discouraged. Equal opportunities should be given to all children irrespective of their sex.

To remove the barrier of poverty or lack of finance for women education, scholarships should be awarded to disserving citizens by the government and free education given.

Women education could be enhanced when we:

- (a) Encourage our daughters to develop their talents.
- (b) Guide our daughters in their career choice
- (C) Treat our daughters with equal dignity and respect
- (d) Give enough time to our daughters to study
- (e) Abandon outdated and callus traditional gender practices and traditional gender practices.

Finally, government should show great interest in women education and should do every thing possible to ensure the continuity and viability. Proper statistic should be provided. The study

centres should be well equipped with qualified personnel, infrastructure and facilities. There should be effective monitoring and supervision of the various programme centres.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the challenges facing women education programmes, all hope is not yet lost. Women education has come to stay in Nigeria. With the government, nongovernmental and international agencies recent attention to women education, the prospects of women education are still high. Women have shown that given the opportunity to develop their potentials, they can become self-reliance socially, economically, politically and contribute meaningfully to: national unity, National reconstruction and development of Nigeria. It is therefore, imperative to create opportunities for women to acquire the necessary skills and training through education to help them contribute to the rapid and sustainable development of the nation and to make them self-reliance.

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