

## **Women Empowerment through Educational Processes in Nigeria: Implications of Religious Curriculum and Practices**

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the multifaceted relationship between Women Education, educational processes and the implications of religious curriculum and practices in the context of Nigeria. The empowerment of women has emerged as a global imperative and education plays a great role in achieving this goal. However, in Nigeria a nation with a diverse religious landscape, the interplay between education, religion teachings and women empowerment warrant a comprehensive examination. This study aims at investigating how religious curriculum and practices in Nigeria impact women's access to and participation in education as well as their empowerment outcomes. Ultimately this study contributes to the broader discourse on women's empowerment through educational processes by shedding light on the following: definition of women empowerment; the current state of women empowerment in Nigeria; significance of women empowerment; educational processes for women empowerment; implications of religious curriculum and practices; implications for educational practices; challenges and road blocks to women's empowerment and so on. The paper concluded by recommending amongst others that federal and state government should ensure equitable access to quality education for girls and women at all levels from primary to higher education.

**Keywords:** Women empowerment, Educational processes, Religious curriculum, Nigeria.

## **Introduction**

Women empowerment through educational processes is of crucial importance particularly within the context of a diverse and culturally rich nation like Nigeria. This pursuit, encompassing both gender-inclusive education and the intersection with religious curriculum and practices, represents a transformative force poised to reshape the nation's future. In a country where traditional beliefs and religious practices often intertwine with societal norms, addressing the role of education in women's empowerment becomes even more complex and critical (Walby, 2015).

Nigeria, known for its rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and religions, stands at a crossroads where the need for women empowerment is increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable development. The nation's commitment to improving access to education has resulted in significant progress in recent years, with more girls and women enrolling in schools and institutions of higher learning.

According to Duflo (2018), there is an intricate interplay between women empowerment, educational processes, and the religious curriculum and practices that shape the lives of millions of Nigerians. It seeks to unravel the implications, both positive and negative, of religious teachings, traditions and attitudes towards women's education.

Through a thorough exploration of the implications of religious curriculum and practices on women's empowerment within the educational framework, this study aspires to provide insights, recommendations, and a broader perspective that can inform policies, practices, and societal attitudes towards women's education in Nigeria. This paper discusses: definition of women empowerment; the current state of women empowerment in Nigeria; significance of women empowerment; educational processes for women empowerment; implications of religious curriculum and practices; implications for educational practices; challenges and roadblocks and so on.

### **(i) Definition of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment refers to the process of enabling and enhancing the social, economic, political and personal capabilities of women, thereby giving them the tools and opportunities to participate fully in society and make decisions that affect their lives. It involves breaking down gender-based barriers and inequalities to promote gender equality and ensure that women have the same rights and opportunities as men (Kabeer, 2014).

Women empowerment is the process of enhancing women's abilities, rights, and opportunities to participate actively in society, make choices, and have control over their

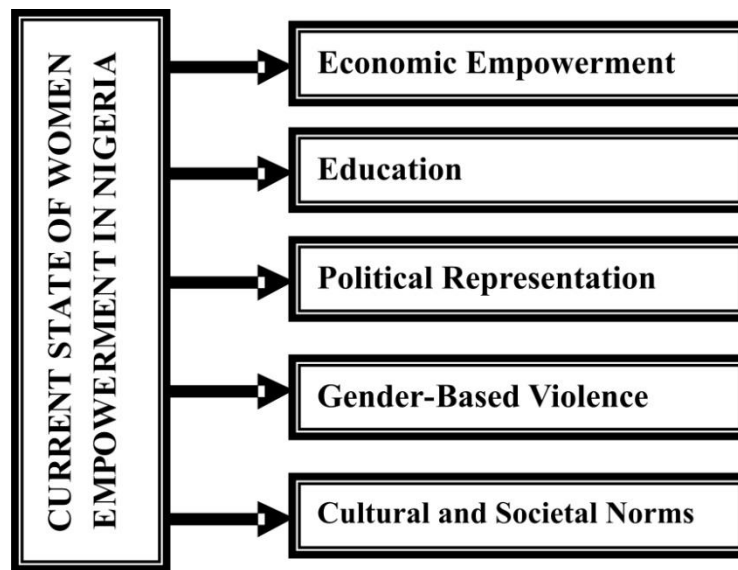
lives. It involves reducing gender-based disparities, challenging stereotypes, and discrimination, and promoting gender equality to ensure that women can achieve their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities and the nation (United Nations Women 2018).

**(ii) Current State of Women Empowerment in Nigeria**

Nigeria, like many countries, has been making strides in women empowerment, recognizing the crucial role that women play in the nation's development and progress. However, it has also faced numerous challenges and disparities that have hindered the full realization of women's empowerment as indicated below:

- ❖ **Education:** Access to education has improved for Nigerian women over the years, but disparities still exist, especially in northern regions. Efforts have been made to promote girls' education, and the government has launched initiatives to reduce gender disparities in school enrollment and retention (United National Women, 2019).
- ❖ **Political Representation:** Women participation in politics and decision-making roles has been growing but remains relatively low. There have been calls for increased representation of women in political leadership positions, and legislative measures like gender quotas have been proposed to address this issue (Omoniyi, 2016).
- ❖ **Gender-Based Violence:** Gender-based violence, including domestic violence and female genital mutilation, remains a serious concern. Organizations and activists have been working tirelessly to raise awareness, provide support to survivors, and advocate for legal reforms (Callaway, 2019).
- ❖ **Cultural and Societal Norms:** Deep-seated cultural norms and traditions still pose obstacles to women empowerment. Efforts to challenge these norms and promote gender equality through education and awareness campaigns continue (McDonald, 2018).

**Fig 1: Diagrammatic Representation of the Current State of Women Empowerment in Nigeria.**

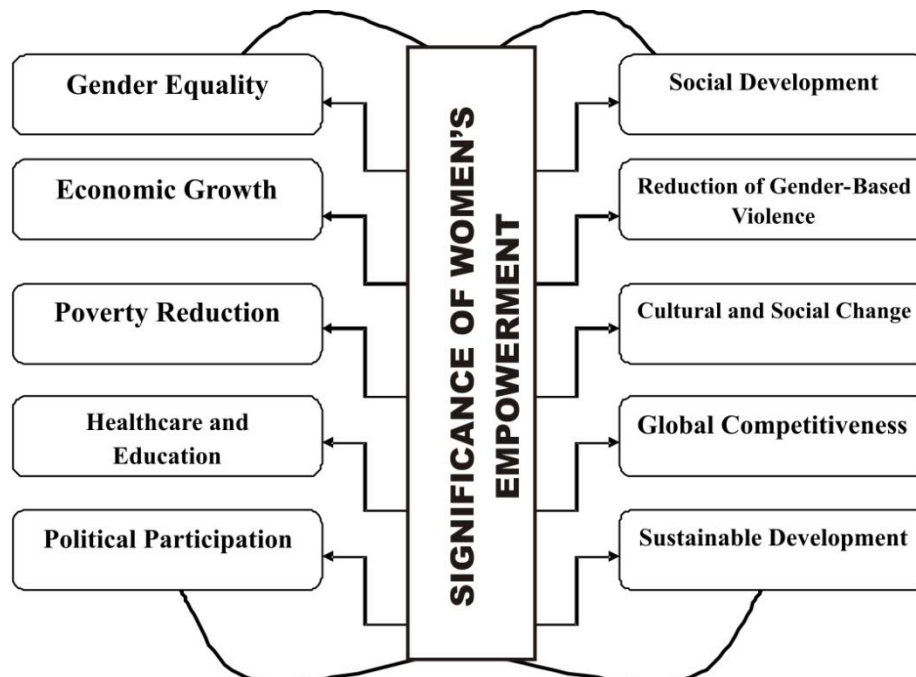


*Source: Modified by the Author*

### (iii) Significance of Women Empowerment

The significance of women empowerment in Nigeria cannot be overstated, as it has far-reaching implications for the country's social, economic, and political development. Reasons why women empowerment is crucial in Nigeria are as follows:

**Fig 2: Diagrammatic representation of Significance of Women's Empowerment**



*Source: Modified by the Author*

- **Gender Equality:** Empowering women is a fundamental aspect of achieving gender equality. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, women have historically faced significant disparities and discrimination in various areas of life. Women empowerment seeks to rectify these imbalances and create a society where men and women have equal rights and opportunities (Ijeoma, 2015).
- **Economic Growth:** Women constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population, and their participation in the economy is essential for sustained economic growth. When women are economically empowered, they can contribute to household income, invest in education and healthcare for their families, and stimulate local businesses and entrepreneurship (Jennifer, 2017).
- **Poverty Reduction:** Women empowerment is a powerful tool for poverty reduction. By providing women with access to resources, education, and economic opportunities, they are better equipped to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. This, in turn, contributes to the overall reduction of poverty at the national level (Khadija, 2016).
- **Healthcare and Education:** Empowered women are more likely to prioritize healthcare and education for themselves and their children. This leads to improved health outcomes and increased access to quality education which are essential components of human development (Mohammed, 2016).
- **Political Participation:** Women's active participation in politics and decision-making processes is vital for a well-rounded and representative governance structure. When women have a say in policymaking and governance, it ensures that a broader range of perspectives and needs are taken into account (FRN 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2013).
- **Social Development:** Empowered women often play a central role in fostering social development. They are more likely to engage in community activities, advocate for social justice, and contribute to the well-being of their communities (Nwadiani, 2013).
- **Reduction of Gender-Based Violence:** Women empowerment initiatives often include strategies to combat gender-based violence. By promoting women's rights and providing support for survivors, these initiatives contribute to reducing violence against women, which is a significant issue in Nigeria (Okwuazor, 2017).
- **Cultural and Social Change:** Women empowerment can challenge and reshape traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Over time, this can lead to more equitable relationships within families and communities (Okoghene, 2017).

- **Global Competitiveness:** In an increasingly interconnected world, countries that harness the full potential of their entire population, regardless of gender, are more competitive on the global stage. Empowered women can contribute to a nation's innovation, productivity, and competitiveness (Obi and Akoyi, 2016).
- **Sustainable Development:** Women empowerment aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Progress in women empowerment is essential for overall sustainable development in Nigeria (Tunde and Zakuah, 2017).

#### **(iv) Educational Processes for Women's Empowerment**

Educational process for women empowerment in Nigeria is essential for advancing gender equality, economic development, and social progress. This approach involves various components to ensure that women have access to quality education and opportunities for personal and professional growth as indicated below according to Okafor (2014) are:

**Accessible and Inclusive Education:** Create and maintain a well-funded and extensive network of schools, particularly in underserved areas, to ensure that girls and women have access to quality education. Implement policies and infrastructure improvements to make schools safe, welcoming, and accessible to all, including those with disabilities.

**Gender-Sensitive Curriculum:** Develop a curriculum that promotes gender sensitivity and addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by **girls** and women. Encourage critical thinking, problem-solving and leadership skills through interdisciplinary and culturally relevant subjects.

**Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** Invest in the professional development of teachers and educators to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to foster a gender-inclusive and empowering learning environment. Training should include gender sensitivity, classroom management and strategies for addressing gender-based violence.

**Financial Support and Scholarships:** Establish scholarship programs and financial support mechanisms to reduce the economic barriers that often hinder girls' and women's access to education. These programs can cover tuition fees, textbooks, uniforms, and transportation costs.

**Vocational and Technical Training:** Offer vocational and technical training programs tailored to the needs of women, preparing them for various industries and professions. These programs should also include entrepreneurship training to enable women to start and manage their businesses.

**(v). Implications of religious curriculum practices for women empowerment**

Some Implications of religious curriculum and practices for women empowerment that should be considered amongst others according to Elsanousi (2017) includes:

**Understanding Religious Texts and Traditions:** Religion teachers must have a deep understanding of their respective religious texts and traditions, recognizing that these texts often contain diverse perspectives on women education. They should approach these texts critically and engage in nuanced Interpretations that promote gender equality and inclusivity.

**Promoting Inclusive Theology:** Encourage the exploration of inclusive theological perspectives within religious traditions. Highlight interpretations that emphasize the Inherent worth and equal spiritual value of all individuals, regardless of gender.

**Challenging Gender Stereotypes:** Religion teachers should actively challenge and deconstruct gender stereotypes that may exist within religious narratives. Promote classroom discussions that explore how these stereotypes have been historically perpetuated and how they can be reinterpreted in a more inclusive light.

**Exploring Gender in Religious History:** Incorporate discussions on the historical role of gender within religious movements and Institutions. Explore how gender dynamic have shaped religious practices, leadership roles, and societal attitudes.

**Highlighting Women in Religious History:** Ensure that the contributions of women within religious history and leadership roles are recognized and celebrated. This can include discussing female religious leaders, scholars, and activists who have played significant roles within their respective faiths.

**Promoting Ethical Reflection:** Use religious teachings as a basis for ethical reflection on Issues related to women education such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and so on. Encourage students to consider how their faith's principles can be applied to promote social justice and equality.

**(vi) Implication for Education Practices of Women Empowerment in Nigeria**

Educational practices for women empowerment is a multifaceted endeavor with implications for educational institution policymakers, educators and society as a whole. There are several implications that should be considered in the pursuit of women's empowerment through education some of them according to Omedes & Agahu (2016) are:

- **Policy Support:** Policy makers should prioritize and allocate resources to support women's educational including initiatives to increase enrollment, retention, and completion rates for girls and women at all educational levels. Legal Framework should

be strengthened and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equality In education. Ensure that gender discrimination is prohibited, and punitive measures are in place for violators (Omedes & Agahu, 2016).

- **Access to Quality Education:** Ensure that girls and women have equitable access to quality education including in remote and marginalized areas. Invest in school Infrastructure, transportation, and safety measures to facilitate attendance. Lifelong Learning should be encouraged to promote lifelong learning opportunities for women, recognizing that education should not be limited to a specific age or life stage (Omedes & Agahu, 2016).
- **Financial Support:** Establish scholarships and financial aid programs to alleviate economic barriers that often hinder women's access to higher education and vocational training (Omedes & Agahu, 2016).
- **Digital Literacy:** Recognize the Importance of digital literacy and ensure that girls and women have access to technology and training in digital skills to enhance their competitiveness in a technology- driven world (Omedes & Agahu, 2016).
- **Health and Hygiene Education:** Include comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in the curriculum, covering topics such as menstrual hygiene, family planning, and gender-specific health issues (Omedes & Agahu, 2016).

**(vii) Challenges and Roadblock on Women Empowerment in Nigeria**

Some of the challenges and road blocks on women empowerment in Nigeria according to Coinco (2014) are as follows accord:

**Socio cultural Norms and Patriarchy:** One of the foremost challenges to women empowerment in Nigeria is deeply ingrained sociocultural norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. Patriarchy Is pervasive, and traditional beliefs often relegate women to subordinate roles within families and communities. These norms limit women's decision-making power, autonomy, and access to opportunities (Coinco, 2014).

**Gender-Based Violence:** Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation, is a significant barrier to women's empowerment. Fear of violence restricts women's mobility and their ability to assert their rights, seek education, and engage in economic activities (Coinco, 2014).

**Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation:** Child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) remain deeply entrenched practices in some regions of Nigeria. These

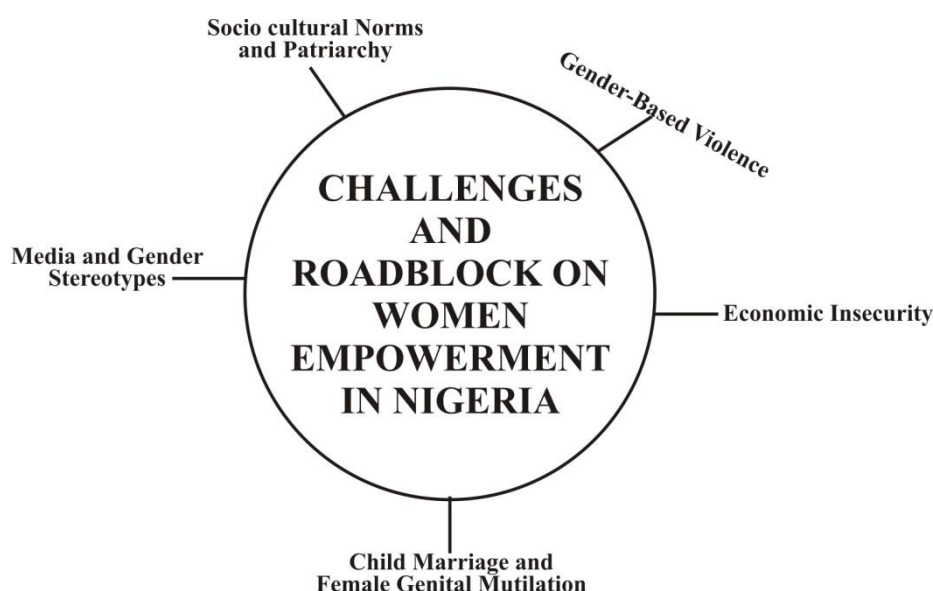


harmful traditions perpetuate gender inequality, jeopardize girls' health and well-being, and limit their opportunities for education and economic empowerment (Coinco, 2014).

**Media and Gender Stereotypes:** Media portrayal and perpetuation of gender stereotypes reinforce harmful notions of women's roles and abilities. Television, radio, and online platforms often depict women in subservient or stereotypical roles, shaping societal attitudes and behaviors (Coinco, 2014).

**Economic Insecurity:** The economic Instability in Nigeria, including inflation and unemployment, disproportionately affects women. Women-headed households are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks, making it difficult for them to Invest in education and pursue entrepreneurial ventures (Coinco, 2014).

**Fig 3: Diagrammatic representation of Challenges and Roadblock on Women empowerment in Nigeria**



*Source: Modified by the Author*

## **Conclusion**

Women's empowerment through educational processes in Nigeria is both a fundamental human right and a catalyst for societal progress. Over the years the country has made strides in promoting gender-inclusive educational processes, recognizing the pivotal role that educated women play in shaping a brighter future. However, significant challenges and disparities persist, hindering the full realization of women's educational potential.

Access to education must be complemented by financial support mechanisms, including scholarships and financial aid, to mitigate the economic barriers that often hinder girls and women from pursuing their educational goals. Parents and communities play a pivotal role in supporting girls' and women's education, and their engagement is crucial in changing attitudes and norms that perpetuate gender disparities.

Women's education should be seen as an investment in the nation's development and prosperity in Nigeria. When women are educated and empowered, they contribute to economic growth, social stability, and the overall well-being of society. It is a collective responsibility to ensure that every girl and woman in Nigeria has the opportunity to receive a quality education, unlock her potential, and contribute to building a more equitable and prosperous future for the nation as a whole.

### **Recommendation**

Some recommendations for promoting women's education and empowerment in Nigeria by the federal and state government are stated below:

- Ensure equitable access to quality education for girls and women at all levels, from primary to higher education.
- Develop and implement a gender-sensitive curriculum that challenges stereotypes, promotes critical thinking, and addresses gender-related issues.
- Provide comprehensive training for teachers on gender sensitivity, inclusive teaching practices and classroom management
- Establish scholarship programs and financial aid initiatives to alleviate economic barriers to education
- Promote parental and community engagement in supporting girls' and women's education
- Offer vocational and technical training programs tailored to the needs of women, preparing them for diverse industries
- Launch nationwide awareness campaigns to raise public awareness of the importance of women's education and empowerment.

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