

WOMEN EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF FAMILY ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE

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Abstract

The paper surveys people's opinions on literacy and family economic self-reliance. The assumption was that homes where the house-wife is literate encounters less family economic crisis than where she is not. Three hundred (300) part-time students currently on sandwich programme in Federal College of Education (FCE) Pankshin formed the sample. A self-developed questionnaire in the Likert format (of five opinions) was the instrument used. Data was collected in class during lecture periods. The major findings is that homes where the woman is literate are usually better self-reliant (economically) than where she is not. It is recommended (among others) that girl-child and women education should be considered as a matter of priority in every home and society in general.

Introduction

It is undisputable that the centre of every society is the family, so also the centre of every family is the mother. These are simple realities of every society, be it ancient or modern. Right from traditional society to date women (mothers) perform multiple roles in the home. For example, their roles range from mothers, childbearing, food production, family health, socialization of children etc. Today their responsibilities have further increased in dimension and complexity, such as being nurses, teachers, counsellors, homemakers, peacemakers, breadwinners etc. These endless social and economic services rendered by women in the family make them very crucial to the survival of families, which attest that societal and family development is incomplete without women involvement and participation in the development process.

It is against this background that this paper intends to find out whether there is a correlation between women education and family self-reliance. In other words, to find out whether the woman's level of literacy can affect her family's economic status.

The Problem

The gains of women education cannot be over emphasized. Literatures reveal that a literate woman can easily integrate into the society so that she can achieve self-realization. Such a woman can be a better peace and homemaker than one that is not. Literate women ensure quality health and food nutrition for their homes. Other benefits include, employment opportunities, over-coming economic dependence, self-empowerment, knowledge of one's rights and privileges etc (Dakun, 2001).

Taking into cognizance the multifarious roles of women in the home vis-a-vis the gains of women education. One begin to wonder whether illiterate women can meet up with the challenges of running the modern day Nigerian families. Because we all know that the "care for extended family members" hitherto enjoyed by African societies is gradually giving way to alien cultures.

The crux of the study is to ascertain if families where the mother is an illiterate will normally face economic problems. In other words, whether literacy (of women) is a factor in determining the economic status of every family.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions are raised:

- 1) Is illiteracy a hindrance to family economic self-reliance?
- 2) Can basic education transform a woman to be an economic asset to her family?
- 3) Can basic literacy contribute to family resource management?

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to:

- a) Find out if illiteracy is a factor determining the status of family economic self-reliance.
- b) Assess the negative effects of illiteracy on the socio-economic difficulties of families.
- c) Emphasize the importance of educating women to enable them effectively play their economic roles in families and communities at large.

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings of this study will make government and stakeholders to become more aggressive in their quest to make Nigerians become economically self-reliant. Husbands and

people alike will also be awakened by the findings, thus can see the need for women education.

Literature Review

³. It is popular that in Nigeria, education has been identified as an instrument for excellence for effective national development (NPE 1998). This national position testifies that the best and fastest way for individuals to develop socially, economically, politically, and morally etc is to acquire as much education as possible.

Education thus serves as the most appropriate instrument for the transmission of worthwhile values and skills to people. It thus becomes a very useful tool for human development, as the educated stand to be more confident of self-dignity.

On the other hand, the uneducated individual is ignorant, crude in reasoning, easily intimidated by the harsh economic and social challenges of the time. The uneducated equally lacks ideas, skills and he/she is likely to be naive, weak, timid and lacking in foresight for a broad based resourcefulness.

In view of the above positive impact of education on social and economic emancipation, the persistent inability to achieve self-fulfillment and economic self-reliance is a result of the women folk access to basic education. Describing the rate of illiteracy among women in the world, Adewale (1997: 13) asserts, that:

The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has projected that of the 850 million illiterate people in the world, nearly two-thirds are women.

The same projection equally revealed that 90% of women in the 45 least developed countries miss out on secondary education. Further-more, UNESCO (1992) report that from an estimated 887 million illiterates in the world, 27% are adults, majority of whom are women.

Similarly, Chindaya, (2000) referring to a study by Moda (1992) reports that of the 1.5 million women in Bauchi State, only 15% are literate. And out of this, estimated populations of over 850,000 are at childbearing age, with less than 20% who have never gone to school. Lamenting on this pathetic experience of the Nigerian families, Chindaya (2000) asserts:

The unfortunate development has caged most women in an ignorant state on issues affecting the well; as of their families and communities.

It is therefore the position of this study that basic education is a relevant panacea to maximize the level of awareness and knowledge of the women folk. Our conviction is that basic education will ultimately:

- a) Enable the individual woman to be economically self-reliant.
- b) Challenge and encourage her to use the available resources in her environment.
- c) Enlighten and encourage her to promote personal hygiene, self and family cleanliness.
- d) Prepare and motivate her to identify her individual economic problems and seek solutions using local resources in her environment.
- e) Promote her natural qualities of symbol and epitome of peace to bring about the avoidance of conflict or war.

In the light of the above, the quest for basic education to permeate the entire sector of our urban and rural women becomes imperative, as it will ginger their potentials of creativity, industriousness, caring attitude, endurance, patience, prayerfulness etc. Molokwu (1990) emphasized, "Family sustenance rest upon the woman through development and implementing programmes in various ways as it affects the family". Her emphasis is on skill acquisition through elaborate women education.

Design

The survey design was adopted in conducting the study **Population**

A total of 300 primary school teachers on sandwich programme in Federal College of Education (FCE) Pankshin, consisting of males and females constituted the sample for the study. The subjects are serving teachers from both urban and rural areas of Plateau and Bauchi States. The subjects were purposively selected because of their accessibility i.e. enrolment for the sandwich programme in FCE Pankshin. To obtain the sample, the simple proportionate random

sampling technique was employed to sample the 300 subjects that make up the sample. The sample was drawn from the five levels based on population.

Eighty five percent (85%) of them are married with an average age of 40 years. See Table 1 for the distribution of the sample according to levels.

Table 1

Level	Population	Sample
Year I	134	18
YEAR II	183	31
YEAR III	272	55
YEAR IV	340	73
YEAR V	432	123
Total	1361	300

Table 1: Distribution of the sample according to levels.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for the study is a 20 item questionnaire in form of the Likert-type measure of five 5 points only. The measure was subjected to critical comments by five 5 experienced

Lecturers; three 3 from Psychology Department and two 2 from Guidance and Counselling department in FCE Pimkshin, as a way of estimating its validity. The instrument seeks subjects' opinions on "women education and family economic self-reliance".

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaires were administered in class as the students were waiting for their lectures. After the sample was selected (randomly) the researchers distributed the questionnaires and allowed the subjects twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire by ticking the options that most represent their opinions. At the end of the twenty minutes, the questionnaires were retrieved and lectures continued thereafter.

Data Analysis Procedure

The options are weighed as, strongly agreed (5), agreed (4), undecided (3), disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (1). The central theme is the relation between "women education and family self-reliance". People who strongly believe that a literate woman in the home can increase the economic status of her family will generally score higher on the scale. On the other hand, those who strongly disagree with this opinion will score very low on the scale.

Data Analysis

Generally speaking, opinions expressed by respondents tend to favour literacy as a basis for family economic self-reliance (see Appendix I). This position is true for all items except item 8. For item 8, respondents tend to disagree with the statement that, "it is economically more advantageous to educate the woman in a family rather than a man (where funds are scarce)". While the value for negative opinions (put together) is 312, the positive opinions value is only 169. This may be attributed to the stereotype of "men's superiority over women (economically)."

Data also shows that "one of the socio - economic dilemma of families is the lack of basic education of mothers" (item 13). While the summative weight for favourable opinions is 462, that for negative opinions is only 48. The same is true of the opinion that "Literate mothers are most likely to sustain their children in school for longer period than illiterate ones" (item 7 is 990 against 36).

The answer to the question, "is illiteracy a hindrance to family economic self- reliance¹?" Is yes. This is because respondents generally agree, "Homes where the mother is literate are usually better self-reliant (economically) than where the mother is not. Similarly, they also agree that "literate widows do not usually suffer serious economic crisis in their homes" (items 20 and 19 respectively).

Responding to the statement, "literate women can manage the family's resources better than illiterate ones" (items 3), subjects indicated positive opinions. Therefore the answer to research question 3 is yes. In the same vein, the answer to research question number 2 is also yes. This is because subjects agree that, " Literate mothers are more committed to

family resource income generation than illiterate ones" (items 18). Secondly, that, "working mothers can contribute to the economic base of the family" (item 5). And thirdly, that "women education has positive effect on family income" (item 9).

It is pertinent to note at this juncture that popular opinion expressed in this study tend to suggest that literacy of a woman in the home is a crucial factor in determining family economic self-reliance. However, there are few who are still skeptical about women education. In fact, some out-rightly "strongly disagree" that a literate woman can do better (economically) than her illiterate counterpart in the home. Though they are few, their opinions shouldn't be dismissed.

Conclusion

Considering the multifarious duties women perform in the home and society, the benefits of their education cannot be ever-emphasized. Particularly, education can assist the woman to over-come family economic dependence and manage well the family's resources. Education can also transform the woman in the home to be a better homemaker.

Finally, it is worth it to say that when most people can meet their family needs, the rate of social ills in the society can drastically reduce. For example, there will be no "drop - outs" for reasons of "no school fees".

Recommendations

On the grounds of our findings, we wish to recommend as follows.

All families should consider girl-child education as matter of priority. Woman who are adults and missed formal education should take advantage of the literacy programmes being mounted by government.

The cynical and skeptical views of some people on women education should be discarded forth with. Because the need for women education cannot be compromised.

Government (through the Houses of Assembly) should legislate on girl-child and women education and put- up stiff penalties for people who dare flout the law.

4. Government should take to the grass roots all programmes aimed at enhancing economic empowerment of women and or families.
5. Finally, home economics, home management and courses allied to these should be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum and made compulsory for girls but sponsored by Government.

Data Obtained

S/No.	SA	A	VD	DA	SOA
1.	500	424	0	36	0
2.	540	440	12	52	2
3.	540	408	18	32	10
4.	520	376	30	76	4
5.	600	408	0	24	0
6.	420	480	48	28	4
7.	470	520	12	36	0
8.	17	152	24	280	32
9.	320	488	6	72	12
10.	360	432	66	76	14
11.	140	248	54	248	18
12.	350	456	6	72	10
13.	350	112	48	48	0
14.	270	520	0	80	16
15.	380	512	12	48	16
16.	140	480	42	108	10
17.	340	512	18	116	10
18.	390	424	18	100	12
19.	210	272	42	120	26
20.	490	248	0	60	8

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