

FEMALE EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Vincent Ebeigbe

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
College of Education, Agbor,
Delta State.*

Okoh Fredrick Nweneaziri

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
College of Education, Agbor,
Delta State.*

And

Paulina Egwuelu Onogiemensike

*Department of Educational Foundations and Administration,
College of Education, Agbor,
Delta State.*

Abstract

Women education has been of special interest to scholars and researchers. Many debates have been held in seminars, conferences and lectures about female education. It is a truism that when you educate a male, you have educated an individual, but when you educate a female, you have educated the family and entire society. Obviously, for several decades, the female child was undervalued and denied access to formal education. Formal education for female child was considered a waste of time and resources. It should be noted that investing in the female child education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and advancing national development. This paper x-ray the concepts education, female child, causes of discrimination, the role of female child to national development, conclusion and recommendation.

Female education has been of special interest to researchers. Many debates have been held in seminars, conferences and lectures about female education. Traditionally, female child is seen as being meant for just procreation, rearing of children and keeping the home. These were traditionally, the age long major functions of the female. Moreso,

there was the strong belief that female education is a waste of resources of her parents and will eventually be married to another family.

Training the female child helps in various homes in the provision of their day-to-day feeding. If a female child is educated, a nation has been educated because the female child will definitely transfer what she has learnt to her children. Investing in the female child education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and enhancing national development.

Gone are the days when female children are seen as only home keepers, house helps and house wives. Okeke in Ihebereme (2012) define female child education as the basic training offered to a female child which is functional for female of school age.

Development is the marked change for better. No nation in the world that wants to progress will take for granted the education of that country. Nobody can deny the fact that education is the bedrock of any developed nation; as no development can take place in a country where the education system of such a country is gender sensitive. The parents and guidance should stop discriminating females from male education. The recent technological development in the world today is attributed to the breakthrough experienced in the field of education. So any country yearning for any meaningful progress must accord education a special place in the scheme of its business, the females should not be left out. Education is an agent of change which transforms those who pursue it. It is a known fact that no development can take place without good and standardized education. Therefore females should not be denied education.

Education

Education is a life-long process of acquiring skills that enable the individual to be useful to himself/herself and the society in general. Ebeigbe (2014) opines that education is a continuous process that creates in an individual the competence to function academically, occupationally, politically, socially, and morally. Education is a means by which the individual acquires the skills and knowledge which makes it possible for him/her to function effectively in the society. Ukeje (2001) defines education as a process of transmitting, preserving, developing, and advancing the culture of the people. The essence of education is morality and value transmission.

Over the years education has been considered to be important for the individual and societal development. The position of education to any country is due to the recognition of the contributions of education in terms of the country's scientific, religious, political, sociological, technological advancement and a means towards economic survival. Any country that place education on a wrong position is bound to experience failures. In Nigeria the role of education in National development has equally helped in projecting various aspects of individual, communities and the nation at large.

Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change, any fundamental change

in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to proceed by an educational revolution (FGE 2004:8).

The essence is to enable one function effectively in any environment in which he/she might find him/herself. Ukeje (2001) also recognized the importance when he define education as a process, as a product and as a discipline. Education is a process of transmitting, preserving, developing and advancing the culture of the people. As a process education is an activity rather than an idea or a concept viewed as a product.

According to him, (Ukeje) education means change in behavior that is desirable and acceptable in the society in which the individual finds himself. The above means that education is important to the normal, the disable and the handicapped persons. Thus, education is that process which helps the whole man to grow. There are three forms of education; According to Coombs and Ahmed (1974) are formal, informal and non-formal education.

Informal Education: Refers to the education received through experience, exposure to the environment at home, at work or play, examples are from families and friends, from travel, mass media, books, newspapers etc. It is not organized.

Formal Education refers to the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured educational system which starts from primary school to university levels.

Non-formal education refers to organized systematic educational activity carried on outside the frame work of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population. It includes Agriculture extension and farmers training programmes, occupational skills etc.

For rapid development, the involvement of women and men is essential since education helps to prepare citizens for participation in development. Women can be integrated into national development in two ways. They can be participants in and beneficiaries of development, both are inter-related. Education provides the basic knowledge and skill required in today's dynamic society of changing values and attitudes. It equips the individual with some measure of stability and confidence in dealings and interacting with others. Education, especially scientific education frees the individual's mind from the enslavement of superstition, ethnicism and narrow minded view which retard development. Thus, from all angles, education provides basic ingredients for sustainable development when all citizens are involved and no group is excluded or marginalized.

An educated citizenry is seen to be more productive, economically and more satisfied, politically, contributing to national wealth and stability. Governments therefore provide education both as a benefit to be equitably distributed to their citizens and as a resource to be used by their citizens for future development.

The incidence of female illiteracy is alarming/high. Female illiteracy constitutes the bulk of the illiterate population. Lack of education for the girl child especially in the

rural area not merely precludes them from productive employment opportunities but also affects the quality of life of the girl when she later become a woman.

Studies have conclusively shown that female illiteracy is the single most important factors in determining the success of family planning and primary healthcare service. Women with education usually have more opportunities, more access to family planning information and more decision-making power in their families. They are also likely to marry later in life and to have their first child later in life and to space childbirth. Child mortality decreases with female education.

The Concept National Development

Development means progress, growth and change. It is also growth in structure and in functions. It is a stage reached by nation – It is the growth of production and income of the nation. It is the transformation of social and economic structures (Ebeigbe 2014).

Development according to Ekejiuba (1985) a sociologist define development “as a process of transformation in which the individual and the society creatively interact with the environment which has finite nonrenewable resources, with a view to improving their quality”. Our focus in education settles on the process of transformation in which the individual as a part of the society creatively interact with the environment with a view to improving the quality of life.

Development connotes advancement of skills, process of output. It means improvement on the status-quo. Umoru (2012) defines development as growth plus changes which involves material, mental, psychological, physical and instructional innovations. National development is the maximization of the potentials of the total environment of Nigerian economic, physical, political and human resources for the betterment of the citizens. Development is about self reliance in any aspect of national life. Hence, it is necessary to make the individual to be in a position to improve the society in which he/she lives. It needs the acquisition of special skills by citizens for exploitation of the nations and natural resources for societal improvement. It is a change by which the entire social system turned away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory condition of life regarded as material and spiritually better.

Development embraces changes that would improve the human elements, who in turn would improve their society, social institutions, and per capital income. This can only be feasible through education.

The Female Child

Oxford advanced dictionary defines female as a girl or woman, a sex that can give birth to babies. The female child is a female gender of human race capable of giving birth to babies.

Dictionary of Education (1972) The female child is a mother to be. She helps with house works, works in the factories, makes friends, cares for the elderly and

younger family members and prepares to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Girl child play multiple roles in the household, society and the economy.

The right of the child is backed by United Nation Millennium Development Goals target of increasing equality between girls and boys educational attainment (Anderson 2006).

Many females in the rural area and even in the urban areas lack basic reading and writing skills. Even when the girl child is encouraged to continue their education, they face many challenges that make it difficult for them to attend school regularly. The girl child has a lot of household tasks due to customary practices in many regions of the world (Khalid 1990).

Though life for the girl child is improving but many are still subjected to horrific practices such as female genital mutilation, son preference, often resulting in female infanticide as well as child marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse. The girl child is likely to experience discrimination in food allocation and healthcare and are often outpaced, and outranked by boys in all spheres of life (Nwanham and Ebeigbe 2014).

The convention on the right of the child, the convention was adopted in 1989. It is one of the most ratified conventions in the world. The convention on the right of the child states that “parties shall respect the right of the child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s parents or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status”. This convention was attended by 191 countries who also ratified the discrimination against the child which promote the right of the girls and women.

Challenges of Female Child to Education

Females are faced with a lot of challenges in the nation. They are devastated by diseases, mayhem, civil strife, discrimination by evil custom such as early marriage, inferiority complex to male, teenage marriage and school dropout. The female child is robbed off her dignity, pride, rape and abuse. These challenges have hampered female education.

1. Formal employment

Data available from UNDP have placed females in the formal sector far below that of their male counterparts. Their chances of even getting waged employment are less than male, only 3 out of 10 females are in paid employment (Ummu, Ahmad Jalingo).

2. Cultural stereotypes and discrimination of the Girl Child

High levels of “cultural stereotype threaten the development of a girl child and her right to education. Negative stereotypes are used to judge their behavior, thus impairing their performance as women in later life/years. Cultural stereotype subordinate the girl child by confining her to the narrow domestic sphere of the household.

3. Preference for male child

Female children are made to feel that they are a burden to the family and were discriminated against. They are accorded second class status. Some even go to the extent of saying that given birth to female child is ill omen. The rural female child unlike the boy child is made to clean the house, fetch water, look after children, cook food, wash clothes, tend to animals and sick family members, attend to guests etc while the boy child will be playing which is preferential treatment.

Due to the preference by the cultural stereotype, the female child is more vulnerable to all forms of violence, particularly sexual violence including rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and trafficking (Hyde 2006).

Inferiority Complex, the preference of male child to female child by cultural stereotype makes the girl child look inferior to male child counterpart. The birth of a male child is greeted with celebration while the birth of girl is received with mix-feeling.

Some societies discriminate against the female child in all fields of human endeavors. This undermines the individual self-esteem. This entrench a feeling of inferiority to the child.

4. Health

The rural women are physically, mentally, and emotionally challenged. These vicissitudes have translated in their dwindling health status. The females work longer hours, caring for the young and the old. Their sources of finance are limited. They engage in physically strenuous jobs and are vulnerable to a lot of hazards.

5. Teenage school dropout

Some parents do have the fobia or fear that sending the girl child to school will end-up in pregnancy, which is a lost of scarce resources of the family. A study by the University of Ibadan linked the imbalance in boys' and girls' participation in education to the long-held belief in male superiority and female subordination.

6. Polygamous family

This is a family system where a man is marrying more than one wife at the same time. The man in most cases supports the education of the male children than the female ones. This hampers the education of the female child.

7 Poverty: The poverty of the parents is settled by giving out the girl child to another family as wife even when it is not in the consent of the girl child.

8. Decision making process: The girl child is deprived of participating in decision making. This makes the girl child timid and of less importance in the family. They are deprived of social, economic and political functions in the society. So these are some of

the challenges hampering the female child education and affecting national development.

Benefits of Female Education

Education is the development of all human faculties for the good of man. Okeke Oluchi in Atama (2012) categorized the importance of female child education into the following:

Mentally: This is where education train up the girl-child's mind, equipping the individual with knowledge which can be applied to situations to achieve better results of acquiring knowledge:

- (a) It builds up self confidence and self esteem in the girl child.
- (b) It improves her managerial abilities as she will acquire good leadership skill.
- (c) It broadens the mind of the girl-child's outlook in terms of marriage, child upbringing, home keeping and relationships in the society.

Physical: The individual obtains skilled manpower, it enriches the individual by equipping her with better standards and builds her up to become an asset in terms of human resources and technological development. This improves the girl-child condition of living.

Social: Education empowers the girl-child to self reliant in national development, she gets better job placements into various industries and places of work which helps her to earn proper and good remunerations. Education also enables her to contribute to innovation and creativity in various fields of endeavors that enhance the economic growth of the nation as a result of improved quality of the nations human resources which assist in further education of the nation at all levels resulting in the curbing of unemployment in the midst of available resources in the nation.

Morally: Education of the girl-child modifies her to the best life style she chose from her role model. Most of these children admire their teachers, neat newscasters or women of God. Gradually, they will strive to be like them. Some have leant good moral behaviors by imitating others.

Contributions of Females to Nigerian Development

Female Education is very important for any developing country like Nigeria, to develop all her human resources whether male or female. Some contributions are as follows:

- Participation In Development: Since education is a benefit of development, it must be made equally available to all citizens beginning from basic education level which has been described as "the key to the success or failure of the whole system"

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). The 1991 national census shows that females make up 49.7% percent of the Nigerian population, while the males are the remaining 51.3 percent, almost fifty-fifty proportion. On this basis alone, it is expected that resources, opportunities, responsibilities and activities for and in the interest of the nation would be shared equitably between male and female citizens. It is particularly pertinent that education which is a benefit for development must be made equally available at all levels to all citizens regardless of gender. Additionally, a neglect of female education means loss for future development of skilled manpower. Women participation in development can be in the economic, political, or social sphere. Economic participation implies participation in producing the nation's wealth through economic and political activities on the holding of positions in the civil service, judiciary or executive government where important decisions are made. The traditional roles of women are to be good wives and mothers. It is their duty to socialize the next generation in the value and behavioral patterns of the community. It is often assented that educated women do not make "good mother" but that is not true. Levine (1980) in his study revealed that indigenous patterns of infants and child care all over the world represent successful adaptations to the condition of life and value patterns of different societies. These patterns have been effectively transmitted by parents who had no formal education. Non-literate women were thus good mothers by the relevant standard of the prevailing culture. One could argue that educated women make "better mothers" because they can be better prepared for their children for participation in the new socio-economic changes than uneducated women. The educated mothers are able to adapt to changes and strategies of life for their children. They are good in taking decisions in the marital responsibility, economic and medical areas. They have fewer children, thus improving the quality of life for her children by allocating more resources such as time and money to the children. They are more likely to provide a healthy diet, seek proper medical help ensure that their children are immunized, and follow medical advice for the treatment of her children, leading to lower infant and child mortality. She is more likely to purchase educational goods and service for her children such as books, toys and wears.

- Economic Role of Women in National Development Nigerian educated women have contributed in recent time to the development of the country. The benefits of female education to the society have multiple effects which are not necessarily the case with male education. The more educated the females are, the healthier the families. There will be more improved hygiene and nutrition, fewer children and better educated children. The more educated females are the more income and improve quality of life. By educating female, the country reduces poverty, improves productivity, and generally prepares a better future for her children. Education is a factor in improving opportunities for women and achieving national development goals. Nigerian women have always and still participate actively in the traditional sectors of both urban and rural areas. In the rural areas, the women are more engaged in farming of food crops and food processing; in craftwork such as weaving, pottery and storing of excess farm output. The rural

women also contribute towards the up-keep and education of their children thereby raising their standard of living. In the urban economy, women are engaged as self-employed jobs such as seamistresses, hairdressers, contractors, traders, of different types.

- **Political Development:** In Nigeria, women enjoyed no franchise until recently when the right to vote was conferred on women. With education Nigerian women became aware of the political situation in the country. With more education, their mentality was awakened and they became alive to the fact that the happenings in the country would affect their own children. They decided to take part in politics. In recent years, we have women like Lady Abayomi, President of Nigerian Women's Party and First Nigerian Councilor. Mrs. Ransome – Kuti who agitated against payment of tax by women at Abeokuta, Mrs. Margret Ekpo, Mrs. Warola Esan and many others like Dr. Dora Akinyelu former chairman of NAFDAC. Dim Etiaba as Deputy Governor of Anambra State, Senator Joy Emordi, Hon. Uche Ekwunife etc. It is good to educate the female child for self improvement, family improvement and for national improvement.
- **National Unity:** Education has opened the eyes of the educated women to the importance of national unity. Now, there is National Council of Women Association, which consists of representatives of each state of the federation. The association arranges different activities which are for the benefit of the women in the country.
- **Empowerment:** Education is an instrument that can empower the female child. She thus can compete on equal terms with the male when given the opportunity to assess her intellectual capacity, which is not in any way inferior to the males.
- **Freedom of Retrogressive Customs:** Education is a sure way out of the quagmire of unjustifiable subordination of female, the paternalistic attitude of men, and the entanglements of taboos and retrogressive customs which bog down the females.
- **Avert Early Marriage:** The education that a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry. Education is a critical factor to reduce child marriage. The length of time in school space out the time of marriage, without education, the girl child cannot voice her opinion.

Conclusion

Efforts at gender equality and gender justice must start with equality for the girl child education. All the barriers must be eliminated to enable the girl child develop to her full potential through equal access to education, training, nutrition, physical and mental healthcare and related information.

Recommendation

As a result of enormous contributions of females in economic, and social and political development of Nigeria the following recommendations are considered.

1. To eliminate all forms of discrimination against girl child.

2. Female education should be encouraged at all levels by parents, husbands and governments for national development.
3. Educated females should be given equal opportunity like the male counterpart in governance.
4. Educate the female child will raise overall quality of the community and by extension a nation.
5. Enforce laws protecting girls from all forms of violence including infanticides, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, child prostitution and child pornography.
6. Let scholarship be given to some females who stand out both academically and skillfully and support to attain greater rights and are ready to go to school. This will challenge other females to enroll in schools of different levels.

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