

GENDER ISSUES AND INSIGHTS INTO NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The social, political and technological advancement of a nation depends, to a large extent, upon the educational standard of its citizens. The male and female citizens ought to be beneficiaries in this honourable human endeavour. Unfortunately, gender poses a lot of problems towards achieving it. Such problems which include: gender disparity, social gender problems, gender problems in career choice, employment etc. are highlighted and possible remedies suggested. Gender problems in Nigerian education system is one of the problems responsible for falling standard of education of the country. This in mind, the writer is of the opinion that frantic efforts should be made to arrest these problems for better realization of the country's stated specific objectives by the year 2010.

Introduction

Areas and fields where gender problems exist in Nigerian education system are inexhaustible. As per this paper, discussion is restricted to only a few areas, which call for immediate attention. Gender is the sexual grouping into masculine (male), feminine (female) and neuter (neither masculine nor feminine). Education itself is a systematic training and instruction especially of the young in schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities. Then, a system is a group of things or parts working together in a regular relation. It could be said to mean an assemblage of objects or functions united by some interactions or interdependence (Hornby, 1985). Nigerian education system therefore, includes all the do's and do not's of its educational institutions working together towards a set goal. For example, the 6-3-3-4 system of education: primary school - junior secondary school - senior, secondary school - tertiary school.

Over the years, there have been a lot of sex antagonisms, discriminations and distinctions between male and female in Nigerian schools. This unfair or unreasonable discrimination between the sexes graduated to what is called sexism, that is unreasonable belief in traditional sexual roles that men are strong and women are weak.

The social and technological advancement of a nation depends to large extent upon the educational development of its citizens. The primary school is the foundation of any level of educational pursuit. As a result, the federal government made it the "right" of every Nigerian child consequent to the recently concluded constitutional conference. The federal government hopes to make education free at this level. In the North-Eastern part of the country for instance, education is free both primary and secondary levels. Despite this, the number of school age children who do not attend school continues to increase. This is more with the female children.

Abdussalami, (1996: 11), wrote that out of a total enrolment of 16,186,214 pupils in Nigeria primary schools in 1993/94, only 7,132,359 were females representing 30.6%. Continuing, the writer-stated that a nation-wide survey conducted last year by the National Primary Education Commission revealed that most of the girls that are not in the school are from the Northern States. The secondary school is not an exception. The National Summary of Post-Primary Statistics (Students' Enrolment) from 1990 to 1994 male and female stood thus:

YEAR	MALE:	FEMALE:
; 1990	1,661,468	1,240,525
1991	1,821,307	1,301,970
1992	1,979,045	1,621,575
1993	2,182,034	1,850,049
1994	2,419,782	2,031,547

Gender problem in education is a world-wide issue especially the third world countries. Nigeria is not an exception. For example, between 1986 and 1989, the rate of female enrolment in primary schools was far below that of males in South Asia with 29%, Sub-Sahara Africa with 20% and Middle East with 18%. In a bid to solve this problem, seminars, workshops, enlightenment campaigns, etc. were organized locally and internationally. Examples are the International Conference

on education (1990) and (UNICEF', 1990). All (hose conferences were aimed at encouraging and improving female enrolment and education.

In 1981, the federal government came up with a policy on education authorizing all ministries of education, local government authorities to work side by side with the Ministry of Youths Development and Social Welfare and Information to encourage parents to send their daughters to school. Still to promote women education, women education units were established at federal and state levels. Government blue-print was released in 1989 to further project women education. The National Commission for Women established in 1982 by the government aims to fostering education for women and children. Today, there is the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. It works towards making Nigerian female citizens to embrace western education and avail themselves with the basic skills.

Gender Disparity in School Enrolment Between Male and Female

Abdusalami, (1996), cited four factors responsible for this. They include:

1. **Religious/Cultural Factors:** According to him, parents in some predominantly Muslim communities still view Western type of schooling as unislamic. Their reason may not be far from the fact that this type of education was introduced by the Christian missionaries. He added, that such parents view these institutions as institutions for conversion, rather than educating their children, hi this type of situation, compulsion is used by village heads, judges, etc. to get these parents change their feelings. To these parents, western education is 'Christian Education' (Nwuior and Ocho, 1985; 162). Worst still, such parents decided to send their male ones and leave the girls to help in household activities and later push them into early marriage. Some' parents also make their daughters to drop out of school when they reach marriageable age. The others do not enroll their daughters because they feel that they would be spoilt and nobody would like to marry them again. This is a case of Northern Nigeria.
2. **Economic Factors:** This is based on purported poverty. Some parents claim that the expenditure on women education is unnecessary and wasted. They will leave home for school, only to come back to marry to join husbands without helping the parents at all. This is not a good reasoning because when a girl marries, her husband's family and that of her father become 'family friends'. They both solve problems together. Due to poverty also, female ones are made to hawk one type of article or the other about the streets to complement in the daily up-keep of the family. This is more common again in the north. A lot of dangers come out of this. These girls instead of hawking their wares, 'hawk themselves'.
3. **Location of Schools:** Schools located at distant places from the settlers contribute to parents refusing their daughters enrolment into them. They fear they would be harassed sexually, instead they send their male children.
4. **Change in Value System:** Economic adversity and unemployment make parents dread sending their children to school especially the girls. This is more common in the North but slightly done in the South.

Social Gender Problems in Nigerian Education System

A lot of social gender problems exist in the Nigerian education system. These social vices range from giving and receiving bribe, sexual harassment, favouritism in admission, lack of objectivity in assessment, unseriousness of female student who are affiliated to male teachers, extreme cases male or female chauvinism, stealing and cultism.

Now, taking these social evils one after the other, one would see that the giving and receiving of bribes has been a canker-worm in Nigerian education system. This act is classified. The boys offer money and what money can buy, while the girls offer their feminine gender popularly called 'bottom power'. This

renders the whole system lousy and moribund, and as a result the academic seriousness of either of these sexes deteriorates. More so, sexual harassment which has eaten deep into Nigerian education system poses a lot of problems too. Before, we use to know that male teachers harass female students. But today, the female students as well as harass male teachers. A female student may raise a propaganda that a male teacher pursued her but she refused, therefore he failed her. This is not true but only a camouflage for her merited failure.

Other areas where gender has negated Nigerian education system are those of admission, assessment and academic seriousness. Admission especially those not based on entrance examination favour the female candidates more than the males due to their powerful bottom. This, therefore, does not lead to the selection of the best. On the other hand, the masculine gender is thrown into the problem of using money to be admitted. Most academic assessments lack objectivity. The teachers/assessors favour their female lovers even at the detriment of the male students. The solution to this problem is the single school system and effective and efficient moderation of examination papers externally though the continuous assessment marks which is at the teacher's disposal still precipitates some loop-holes. Female students who are in love with their male teachers tend not to be serious with their academic work. Reason being that she will receive the teacher's help even if she fails. The irony of the whole thing is that this female student will continue to pass in the hands of her teacher only to disgrace the school and her teacher in the external examination with "F9". It is due to this academic laxity that "EXPO" and other examination malpractices occur.

Additionally, there are cases of extreme chauvinist male or female in Nigerian education system. Some people are personally in dislike of the opposite sex. Some students hate male teachers but like female teachers and vice versa. The same thing applies to teachers on (the side of students. All these are cogs in the wheel to the progress of Nigerian education system. In (the institutions of higher learning, cultism is propelled and propagated by the male students. Though female students belong, but the greater percentage are men. Stealing is another social evil which male students engage themselves in. A number of male students have been reported of their involvement in armed robbery. The female ones do but the frequency is so minimal. Similarly, a habit such as smoking is formed in the school. Such delinquent smokers cause environmental pollution.

Gender Problems Inherent in Co-Education and Single Systems

Gender problems have caused a lot of controversies in the Nigerian education system such as whether to abolish co-educational schools or to go by single schools only. The purpose of this paper is to highlight these problems and suggest possible remedies and recommendations. It is hoped that at the end of this presentation, participants, readers and education planners would find the paper very useful.

A co-educational school is where boys and girls are combined in their schooling. The single school is designed for either the boys or the girls. These two arrangements aim at solving one gender problem or the other, yet these problems preponderate. Common with the co-educational schools are: sexual immorality among the pupils and students. Instead of becoming partners in academics, they become partners in fornication. Also, at times the boys who befriend these girls show their youthful exuberance by challenging their teachers openly. The girls on their own part, instead of concentrating on their studies, flirt about for money to buy the latest fashion to entice the boys. In a co-educational set-up, certain secrets of the girls are exposed vis-a-vis those of the male. Girls being what they are, shy away from the boys so also some boys do. Under the single school setting, it is a duplication of all that are required in a school. Examples are: teachers, instructional materials, school facilities and so on. The government or the communities establishing these schools spend a lot of money, though single schools go as far as eliminating the problems of co-education.

Bias in Career Choice

Statistics have also shown that there exist a lot of disparities and biases in career choice by male and female students. This starts right from primary school where the boys leave some skills like knitting for girls while the girls abandon basket making for boys etc. At higher school level, this problem is more pronounced. I remember a secretarial studies student telling me that secretarial studies is a "woman's course". This boy was never serious until he changed to Business-Administration. By this paper, the writer wishes to make it point-blank that secretarial studies is NEVER a woman's course. Okpala, (1987:24), maintained that the sex of a secretary does not really matter, and it is illegal to discriminate among sex although there may be valid reasons why a man or woman may be preferred for a certain or a particular job or post. According to Shaw, (1977: 13),"A

with cure. To discriminate against them in terms of employment debar them from enrolling into the formal school system. They will conclude that their husbands may not allow them to work and moreover, the employers will refuse them. All these discriminatory treatments result to disparities in the number of male and female employees. Samples are taken from the distribution of academic staff by institution, sex and grade in five (5) Nigerian universities from 1990 to 1993. Also those of the male and female teachers in the post-primary schools from 1990 to 1994 buttress this more.

Academic Staff by Institution, Sex and Grade in Nigerian Universities:

Institution:	Male:		Female	Year:	
	1990	1991		1993	1994
Ibadan	740	590	179	126	1990/91
Lagos	694	590	126	146	"
Nsukka	66	590	81	7	"
Maiduguri	902	590	7	102	"
Abuja	590	711	102	126	1991/92
Ibadan	711	700	126	14	"
Lagos	700	71	14	3	"
Nsukka	71	1091	3	75	"
Maiduguri	1091	539	75	15	"
Abuja	539	720	15	243	1992/93
Ibadan Lagos Nsukka	720	582	243	146	"
Maiduguri	582		146	159	"
National Summary of Post-Primary School Teachers:			159	59	"
	1990	1991	59		"
Male Teachers:	95,303	96,555			
Female Teachers:	46,074	44,936	49,427		
Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1995 Edition, Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos, Nigeria, pp. 187-189.				99,359	97,647
				52,363	54,949

98,103

Remedies To Gender Problems In Nigerian Education System

The following steps should be taken to end the problems of gender in Nigerian education system:

1. Remedies to Gender Disparity in school Enrolment Between Male and Female:

Enlightenment Campaigns: There should be massive public enlightenment campaign on the need for parents to send their daughters to school. Appropriate media should be used for these campaigns depending on the one that will reach the listener. E.g. Radio, T/V, Drama, Jingles, Advertisements, etc. in local languages.

Advocacy Visits: Here people of high reputation, timber and caliber, and political juggernauts should be visited to solicit for their co-operation by way of helping to convince their people on the need to enroll their daughters into school and allow them to finish up. Emirs, Alhajis, Imams, Chiefs, Obas, Ezes and other community leaders are the best to do this enlightenment. **Enactment of Laws:** laws should be enacted to make enrolment compulsory and very severe punishment for, withdrawing any child from school. **Problems of early marriage** should be explained to all these uniformed parents. Medical risks associated with early marriage should be explained too.

Establishment of Schools for girls: By this arrangement, the evils of co-education will not arise. Efforts should be made to incorporate western education into the "Islamiyya" schools'. With this, the girls will have the opportunity to acquire western education in pan pasu with Islamic education (post-primary and post-secondary schools inclusive).

There should be separate toilet facilities if the school is co-educational, as parents do not like a situation where males share toilet with females.

Woman boss may prefer a male secretary because there might be certain aspects of her job for which a male assistance would be useful. A male boss frequently benefits from the views and 'feminine angle' of his female secretary".

The erroneous belief of male students against secretarial studies is further shown with the comparison of male and female students' enrolment into secretarial studies and Electrical Electronics Engineering in all the polytechnics at National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) levels for 1990/91, 1991/92, 1992/93, and 1993/94. Science and Engineering courses are assumed by women to be for men. This is why Nigeria has only one woman pilot in the person of Chinyere Onyenucheya. (See the table below).

Course: Secretarial Studies					
Year:	Male		Female		
	ND	HND	ND	HND	
1990/91	1412	287	2543	686	
1991/92	1640	365	2447	735	
1992/93	1191	410	2629	913	
1993/94	1820	628	3946	1366	

Course: Electrical/electronics Engineering Technology:					
Year:	Male:		Female:		
	ND	HND	ND	HND	
1990/91	2711	782	178	22	
1991/92	2094	547	144	34	
1992/93	2342	1100	159	61	
1993/94	1389	329	132	22	

Source: Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1995 Edition, p. 171

Similarly, gender disparity exists in other subject areas. Such areas as: English Language, French, Religion, Nursing, Home Economics, and Languages etc. These are feminine zone. It is possible to find a Department of French of a school with all of its students female.

Gender Discrimination in the Employment of Female Personnel into White-Collar Jobs

Women are discriminated against in the labour market. Osuala (1984: 78) citing a study earned out by (Coleman, 1980), wrote that a good number of firms in Nigeria do not favour female workers because of social, economic and psychological factors. Married woman have dual roles to-play, that of a home-worker and an office worker. They have to divide their energies between the world of work and her traditional roles as a mother. (Nwogu and Coleman, 1980) as referred to in Osuala, (1984: 78), identified the main factors that hinder the employment of women in Nigeria. They include: women are not physically strong. They are often sick or too emotional. Others are: lack of stability and high rate of turnover, women are usually very noisy in the offices especially when they discuss boyfriends, fashion, they are difficult to control, troublesome and generally they gossip a lot. Employers are not convinced that domestic duties do not affect their women employees work habits. It is believed that women employees endeavour to see that their husbands and children are not neglected as a result of official duties. A study conducted at university of Nigeria, Nsukka, proved that office managers find it difficult to evaluate the technical and professional competence of women. They feel (hey can identify those capabilities and potentials in a man, but doubt their judgment about them in a woman. If the woman is attractive, sexy or appealing, how can the office manager be sure he is evaluating her professional and intellectual capabilities rather than being swayed by her physical appearance? The average office manager prefers women to perform clerical duties only. He does not see the basis to choose a woman over a man with sufficient certainty to withstand expected pressures' from other men (Osuala, 1984). Employers recruit women as "tokens" that is, in the absence of any other thing.

A wise saying puts it that, "something might be good and true, but unless you understand it, you cannot use it" -Parker, (1989: 46). Women natural conditions are obvious and should be handled

The peculiarity of the female child should be recognized. This would make her to remain in school. Gender sensitization through workshops, seminars, symposia, women fora etc are paramount.

The school calendar should be made more flexible. This is to say that special note should be made with special events e.g. Farming season, which always records the highest drop in pupils' enrolment. Other events like Salah, Christmas, Easter etc. should be made to be out of school calendar so that girls who are more ceremonious celebrate at their homes. On the part of the boys, they prefer going to the bush with their cattle, goats, sheep, farming, hunting, koranic learning etc. to enrolling into the formal school system. The very few boys that enroll abscond from school during farming season. Some are never to come back to school while the other will re-appear when the Term is almost ending. Some others report in the subsequent Term/Semester. This at heart, Nomadic schools were established yet the enrolment of these normads into the schools is not encouraging. They enroll today and leave the school the next day for another vicinity thereby disorganizing the good intentions of the government.

2. Remedies to Social Gender Problems

- To end giving and receiving of bribes, the giver should be punished more than the receiver. The activities of school administrators and teachers should be monitored closely by honest and reputable external supervisors to check their excesses.

3. Remedies to Bias in Career Choice

Career Guidance Counsellors should make it clear that no course is womanish or manish. Women who opt for the so called masculine course should be-encouraged.

4. Remedies to Gender Discrimination in the Employment of Women into White-collar Job

Women have always said, "what a man can do, a woman can do better. Let equal opportunities be " given to both sexes. This will make the so-called 'weaker sex' become stronger.

Conclusion

It is hoped that at the end of this presentation, gender problems in Nigerian education system will be a tale to tell and 'education for all in the year 2010' would be a reality but not a rhetoric.

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