

WOMEN EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE

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Abstract

The importance of Women Education in the development of any society cannot be over emphasized. The article points out the need for pursuing women education with all vigour. It stresses what the nation stands to benefit if its women folk are given proper education. It enumerates the contributions women make in the area of politics, economics and social development of the country. It also focused on factors militating against women education, objectives of women education and steps taken to achieve those objectives for self-reliance.

Introduction

Education has remained the hub on which the wheel of life runs. According to the National Policy on Education (1981) education is a process that helps an individual to develop his whole being physically, mentally, personally, politically, socially and technologically to enable him function in any environment in which he finds himself.

From this definition it could be seen that education is for the all round development of the person. It is not the singling out of only one aspect of human faculty for development at the expense of others. It should be all round, complete and balanced.

The above seems not to be emphasized in the area of female education. Many factors which shall be unveiled as this write up progresses will throw light on the imbalanced nature of type of education which females receive both at the traditional and formal levels with the growing awareness and challenges which are coming through the impact of modern women especially the educated ones and other women associations which aim at conscientizing the women folk on the need to be active and play their roles in the society, there arises the need to look at the women education at foundation level.

Women education in Nigeria can be looked at as two systems education, traditional and formal education.

Traditional or Indigenous Education

Indigenous education is the education given outside the walls of school. This types of education starts with the home and the family as the basic instruction point. Mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts and elders in the extended family are the main teachers and instructors. This system of education marked the beginning of education and is greatly characterized by sex - stereotyping (Obayi, 1994).

The objectives of indigenous education are simply, the preparation for functional living and preparation of sex - assigned roles (hence its sex - stereotype nature) Ezewu (1983) lists the

objectives of indigenous education as follows:

To respect, keep and transmit the traditions of the community.

To develop love and respect for the ancestral gods in the traditional communities and cultivate religious feelings.

To develop respect for the land and rivers that provide the means of livelihood.

To develop in the growing child the spirit of collective behaviour.

To cultivate respect for parents and all the elders of one's community and other communities.

To educate capable persons who can take the place of the elders in future years.

Thus, the objectives are selected to meet the immediate demands that the society makes upon the

child. For the male child, there are functions which they are expected both as boys and when they grow into manhood. The games and spoiling activities help lead them in the development of the muscles and full strength. They are therefore exposed to strenuous activities such as wrestling, hunting, cleaning the streams, and constructing new tracts (roads) and maintaining the old ones. For women they are always located into the roles the society assigned to them. They include hobbies as decorating themselves with indigo, plaiting of heads, fetching water, cooking weeding and more importantly bearing and rearing children. A girl right from infant is made to understand that she is a girl and her ultimate goal in life is to be a woman, a wife and a mother, she is always expected to play with toys and objects that make her mimic mothers.

Formal Education

Formal education came with the introduction of Christianity. Missionaries built schools and colleges where children were to be taught. The converts went to the schools especially those built by the denomination of their affiliation.

At the initial period formal education was almost the preserve of the boys. This may be due to the poor status of the parents.

Even at the time when the economy of many homes improved, attitude to women education remained negative for a long time. Many a parent did not want their daughters to go beyond the primary and secondary education. Even in the schools, the girls are also made to believe that some courses are for girls while some are for boys. Hence all the subjects in sciences, technical and vocational, Biology, Economics and Secretarial Studies are preserves for men.

All other subjects in Arts and Social Sciences and languages are seen as comfortable courses for women. Even in the choice of profession, it is recently that some women are realizing that they can be medical doctors and not only nurses, they can be engineers, pilots, mariners and any other profession which had previously been dominated by men. In spite of the fact that many more women have started entering higher institutions, women education still remains in the list of educational disadvantaged groups.

Education for Women: What Type?

Education is not necessarily a subject in any simple sense one does not talk of education in the same way that one talks of learning mathematics or economics.

Education is more akin to a field, which affords exploration from diverse problems, which calls for diverse approaches. Education involves the whole personality and being educated suggests an all round achievement rather than a narrow kind of specialization.

World countries, including rural population in Africa, seem to point to the fact that functional literacy is the most recommended approach (Bhola, H.S.M. and Dikstar, P. 1983; Chlebouska, 1998). While it may not be out of place to approve functional literacy, education for women as a necessary tool for enhanced production would equally be advocated. One may like to add that for a functional education to have a long-term effect, both men and women must be exposed to a broader-based functional education aimed at producing skills and training for enhancing productivity.

Women and Economic Production

There is a major difficulty in trying to estimate the role that women play in the economy and development in Nigeria and most other countries in the world. Most researches and particularly most censuses, national income and official statistics totally ignore and under estimate any productive roles that women may play. Thus the labour force participation rate for women aged 15-35 is estimated at 61% while that of men is 87% (UNESCO, 2000).

However these figures refer only to those in salaried employment which women concentrated in nursing, secretarial duties and primary and secondary school teaching.

Women work with subsistence farming mostly but they also work on their husband's plot, weeding and carrying produce and processing the crops.

Similarly women may engage on their own in goods processing, snacks preparation, small-scale retail trading, selling of crafts and so on. All these forms of production could be enhanced, if equal educational opportunities are granted to women to make them more productive and better

producers.

More researches and training schemes should be organized to help improve on the skills of women. In some cases services have been channeled through men even where women are the main users. This is what one could call displaced attention.

Due to women's lack of access to information, their lack of access to land and capital, even when there are developments in technology in areas of women's work, those areas tend to be taken over by men so that women lost twice over. The many World Bank assisted projects are typical examples.

Factors Militating Against Women Education (Early Marriages)

In most parts of the country, early marriages are frequent occurrences. This practice makes the education of women impossible. In most Moslem homes, girls are given out at the age of twelve or thirteen and are kept in purdan thereby making them perpetually dependent on the men for support. This severely limits opportunity for self-actualization. It is usually difficult for such girls to go to school.

Cultural and Religious Beliefs

Some cultural and religious beliefs hold that women are to be seen and not to be heard. Some even believe that they are not to be seen at all, as they have to be covered from head to toe. To those who believe in this, education of the female children is of little or no importance. Some people believe that since girls will eventually be married off to other men, there is no reason for them to waste their money on the education of the girl child.

Early Pregnancy

Early pregnancy is one of the major problems militating against women education in Nigeria. When young girls of primary or secondary school age get pregnant, they are forced to leave school, and this discourages parents from training them further for fear of a reoccurrence.

Parental Attitude

Parent's negative attitude towards women education also constitutes a problem in Nigeria. A lot of parents, especially illiterate ones, are fond of withdrawing their daughters from school in favour of their sons. This issue of discrimination against women education has caused a lot of concern. Ogundusin (1979) highlights the situation as follows:

Among the circumstances depriving women of their equal opportunity are the age-old traditional concept of the place and role of women, the traditional inferiority complex among the women themselves and the societal condemnation of women who dare break through the taboo curtain that keeps women behind the screen.

It is clear that a situation where consideration is given to male education rather than the female, inhibits women literacy.

Financial Constraints and Prejudice

Financial constraints could force parents not to send their wards to school.

Some, due to poverty, will prefer to educate their male children and leave the females for marriage. Closely related to this militating factor, is prejudice. The negative attitude of men has rubbed off on women as they do not believe in the education of fellow women folk, even their female children. Some men even prefer illiterates as they feel that educated women are too assertive, domineering, free and in general, a threat to the male dominated society.

Discriminatory Practices in the Labour Market

This is another militating factor that confines women to low status and low paid jobs, because women were sometimes deprived of the opportunity that exists in the labour market for them to utilize their education like their male counterparts, they are easily discouraged from aspiring for higher education.

Political Constraints

Nigerian Politics is yet to accommodate educated women in full. Okafor (1999) remarked that women participation in politics is not as encouraging as their male counterparts. According to him, socio-cultural barriers have constituted a serious political constraint on the educated women. In the present dispensation, there are only five women in the National House of Assembly. No women have ever won the Governorship seat and none has ever won the Presidency. For now, only two women are Deputy Governors of two States.

Solutions to the Factors Militating Against Women Education

A lot of factors hindering women education, which cut across culture and religion, have so far been identified. It is left for us to make amends and to ensure that women are given the opportunity to become literate in order to contribute to the development of the nation as a whole.

The following measures will need to be put in place:

1. To arrest the problem of early marriages, the legal age for marriage should be pegged at a minimum of 18 years. This will enable young girls to go to school and to prepare them for life as mothers.
2. Public enlightenment campaigns like workshops, talks, slogans, posters, counseling, if organized for women, can be of immense help in reversing the negative trend of segregation of women in accordance with cultural and religious beliefs. Programmes like the Family Support Programme should be fully utilized in Local Government Areas to change negative traditional attitudes and practices.
3. Guidance and Counselling Centres should be established at all levels of education to control the increasing number of teenage pregnancy cases in our schools today.
4. Stiff penalties should be visited on cases of child abuse, rampant among female children, and all forms of discrimination should be discouraged in families. This can be achieved with the improvement of public enlightenment agencies, especially in areas with literate or semi-literate people.

Financial constraints and prejudice from parents, teachers and the society in general can be controlled by adjusting the educational system to suit the women folk. Special courses could be created to cater for the special needs of women in women related issues, such as family living, health, child bearing and rearing, employment, marital obligation and other pressing issues. This move will encourage women to further their education so that they can contribute their quota to national development.

National Objectives of Women Education

In September 1986, the Federal Ministry of Education established a Women Education branch charged with the following objectives:

- (a) Creating awareness of all citizens to the fact that equal opportunities should exist irrespective of age, gender, locality, creed or special status.
- (b) Provision of more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary levels.
- (c) Provision of functional education for girls and women in field of science and technology, (Federal Ministry of Education, 1986).

Women Education for Self Reliance

In the traditional system of education, women are trained to acquire vocational skills in knitting, weaving, plaiting, circumcision, decoration and carving. Again, when Western education was the monopoly of the missionaries the school curriculum for women emphasized the acquisition of one vocational skill or the other for self-reliance. On the basis of the above position, self reliance as it relates to women education can be viewed as the process of using education as a tool to empower women domestically, economically, politically and socially for sustainable life. Each of the above variables are discussed below.

Education for Domestic Reliance

Women education should be functional in such a way that they will be self reliant in going about their domestic responsibilities. The school curriculum should be designed in order to inculcate . in the women the necessary skills, abilities and capabilities that will enable them to take good care of themselves and the total well being of their families. A good education should enable a woman to face the task and the challenges of giving a child the acceptable moral, social and religious training for a sustainable life.

Social Reliance

Socially speaking, education should be able to provide the necessary social integration needed to enable women be self-reliant. For example, personal solid decisions are very important in the areas of dressing, interactions with other members of the society, membership of social associations without unnecessary influence of other members of the society, it must be realized that before all the above elements of self reliance can be achieved, the curriculum of schools should be restructured in such a way that the relevant skills, aptitude, abilities and capabilities will be inculcated in the learner for a sustained life.

Economic Reliance

A functional education should be capable of empowering women economically. The inculcation of vocational training in home economics could enable women to be self reliant in knitting, sewing, typing and cooking. Again vocational skills in the area of Fine Arts could make women self-reliant in drawing, painting, ceramics, sculpturing and in textile design. With the acquisition of the various vocational skills, women could be gainfully and self employed in the establishment of private schools, typing studios, business centres, restaurants, design .studios and other related business.

Awakening the Self Concept of Women

There should be equal educational opportunities for girls just as we have for boys. There should be removal of those notions that bring about inferiority in our society so that women can feel free to participate in national development. Therefore education of women should be based on their peculiar characteristics and needs in relation to the demands of the society in future. Education should focus on equipping the women with necessary skill, understanding, attitudes and appreciation for participation in the society as full citizens in a democracy. It should aim at a complete change of the status of women in the society as those who are perpetually handicapped. The family and the community must be involved in future education of women in the democratic society. Education of women should bring profiling lists of the country.

Conclusively, it should be emphasized that, the girl of today is the mother of tomorrow. She is a potential first lady, homemaker, homebuilder and the beauty of the family. A family without an educated woman is like an incomplete structure, just like a nation without the participation of educated women will be suffering from intellectual feminism vacuum. Women education is not a luxury but a necessary which requires huge financial investment on the part of the government as well as well meaning Nigerians.

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