

# THE EDUCATED WOMEN IN NIGERIA: AN EVALUATION

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## **Abstract**

The paper gives a definition of the educated woman and states that an educated woman is expected to bring up her child to meet the challenges of the present day. The acquisition of western education has made women get the technical and managerial skills to significant posts often reserved for men. Education has elevated Nigerian women from being passive members of the society to active partners in decision making both at home and in the society. It also presents the educated woman as a mother and a career woman and emphasizes the implications for African culture. The paper recommends amongst others that more women should be encouraged to go to school so that our children will be properly taken care of, more so that sanctions for parents who fail to send their children to school should be implemented. The paper concludes that Education is the bedrock for empowerment, and it is the only panacea to women empowerment and gender equality not only in Nigeria, but in all parts of the world.

## **Introduction**

Education is the bedrock for empowerment and it is the only panacea to women empowerment and gender equality not only in Nigeria, but in all parts of the world. There is need for parents to provide quality education for the girl-child. The significance of good education to the Nigerian woman cannot be over emphasized, considering the fact that without education, it would be difficult to become genuinely economically and politically empowered and to be relevant in the society."Education has equipped women to become better traders and farmers. This is in addition to the fact that an educated woman is likely to be a better house wife and home manager, and be able to pay more attention to children's health, education and personal hygiene.

Many Nigerian women have acquired formal education and are found in virtually every part of Nigeria today. Most of these qualified women are employed and are working in various establishments contributing their quota at the local, state, national and international level. Many others are self employed and also playing appreciable roles in national development. In the educational sector, women account for a good percentage of the teaching force especially at the nursery, primary and secondary school levels.

An Educated Woman.

According to Egbuna (2007) an educated woman is "a cultured woman and knows how to behave in a proper manner – she is gentle, polite and respectful". From the African perspective, an educated woman is a woman who

has acquired formal or western education at least up to post secondary level. She is a woman that knows and asserts her rights. She plays the role of a mother, a wife and also a career woman. Education has made some women prominent in the affairs of the nation; a few of such women are:

- Prof Grace Alele-Williams, Former Vice-Chancellor and First Female Professor of Mathematics in Nigeria. She made her mark as a first class academician and proved herself as a skilled administrator
- . Mrs Laraba Gambo Abdullahi (Vice Chancellor of University of Abuja).
- Professor Jadesola Akande was the Former Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University.
- Professor Obioma Nwaorgu is a Professor of Public Health Parasitology.
- Professor Dora Akinyili was the Former Director General of National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). She is acknowledged worldwide for her efforts to rid Nigeria of fake, adulterated and expired drugs. She is presently the Minister of information.
- Professor Ndi-Okereke Onyuike, the former Director General, Nigeria Stock Exchange. She turned the Nigerian stock Exchange into international reckoning.
- Dr (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance, now Chief Executive of World Bank.
- Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwisili was the former minister of Education, also serving in World Bank presently.

Some of these women like Prof (Mrs.) Okonjo Iweala will not be forgotten by many Nigerians, because it was during her tenure as Minister of Finance, according to Amamchukwu (2006: 58) that 18 billion dollars debt relief was granted Nigeria.

During the first republic, there were women like late (chief) Mrs Margaret Ekpo, Lady Abayomi Oyinkan, Mrs Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti among others. There are in the present political dispensation some women serving as ministers, legislators, deputy governors among sensitive and high ranking positions.

### **The Educated Woman as a Mother**

As a mother, an educated woman is expected to bring up her children to meet the challenges of the present day world. Many cases of juvenile delinquency originate from homes where parents are not living up to their expectations. Biakolo (1993) contended that “educated mothers are better wives because they can prepare their children for healthy participation in the socio-economic order. A school child spends about six hours at school and about eighteen hours at home. The mother’s influence on the child is therefore very

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great during the formative years and a mother with a good education can help a growing child tremendously. There is this wise saying that “if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family and the nation” (Uchendu, 1995). Education has made mothers to be in a better position to look after their children when they are sick, to seek proper medical attention and follow medical advice in the treatment of their children. The education of women has ensured the survival of many babies/children who would have died in the past due to lack of proper care and immunization. The rate of infant mortality has therefore decreased, children thrive and learn quickly; thus mothers and children are happy and healthy. Educated mothers now appreciate and understand the best methods of feeding their children; They are more likely to provide healthy diet, As a wife, she is expected to look after her husband – a duty she no longer wishes to share with others as in the days of expanded family/communal living. She is now capable of carrying out intellectual conversations on contemporary issues. She can discuss more freely on issues that are of interest to the husband and their children. In a study conducted by Olusanya, (1997) wives were asked whether they ever discussed the number of children they desired with their husbands. 81.9% of those who had post-secondary education and 59.5% of those who had only primary education responded in the affirmative. This confirms the importance of education to women and the awareness it has created.

As a wife, she is therefore expected to know about balanced diets, cook palatable dishes for the family and most importantly know when and how to respond to her husband’s needs. She is also expected to cope with intricate modern household appliances, keep the home clean and help financially in housekeeping.

### **As a Career Woman**

Women are no more strictly tied to the roles of mothers and wife, rather they had become co-bread winners with their husbands by sharing financial responsibilities ( Zudanneck, 1987). Women have also become professionals in many fields. It is now possible to see a good number of women occupying positions that require high level of skills in industries, civil service and in the business world. This has been possible because of the significant improvement in their level of education and the professional skills they have acquired. They are now taking over certain areas of the economy like teaching in the primary and secondary schools. It is not an overstatement to say that there is no facet of life that women are not playing active parts. Consequently, educated women now are teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects etc and educated women compete vigorously with men in the labour market. Many possess intimidating credentials and laurels which some of their male counterparts do not have. Education has brought economic freedom to women. This according to Uchendu (1995) “has made people to observe that education has broken the bound that was

~~Dr. Josephine Azuka Onyido and Anna Preye Brambaifa~~ holding women back and has improved the economic role of Nigerian women significantly". As the economy changes, the women are charged to face the new economic realities. Eboh (2004) in observing the new roles and functions played by both men and women in the society stated that this movement has led to the concept of women's liberation phenomenon in the changing world. With dismay to Eboh, this changing situation has adversely affected the societal norms, tradition and values of the people. Women's choice of career is sometimes determined by the women themselves without any formal discussion with their husbands.

## **Implication for African Culture**

### **Socialization**

The freedom education has given to women has some social implications in some African norms and culture. Prior to this time child rearing and socialization of the young ones was the main duty of the mother and other members of the extended family. Today due to the influence of western education and other closely related phenomenon like urban-rural migration, urbanization, industrialization and modern mass communication, the extended family has collapsed.

### **Divorce**

Divorce used to be very rare, whenever marital disagreement occurs, the elders quickly intervene as marriage counselors and amicable settlements are consequently effected. Divorce was regarded as a challenge to the reputation, prestige and integrity of the families of both partners; hence all efforts were made to prevent its occurrence. Education has enlightened women so much that they do not want an infringement of their rights as wives. Women now resist subjugation and marginalization by their male counterparts and would ask for a divorce if it gets to an unbearable point. Therefore, marriages are bedeviled by high divorce rate and its negative consequences. Many professional women would prefer to remain single and have children out of wedlock.

### **Selection of Marriage Partner**

Marriage in the African culture was a joint affair between the families of both the man and the woman, the relationship is meant to cement the couple's families. Generally, marriage was practically devoid of courtship. Romance was expected to develop after the marriage. During the period between betrothal and marriage, the boy and the girl were not expected to have any sexual relationship as the girl was expected to be a virgin until her wedding night. Today, some relationships between the young man and woman have little or no parental interference. This has weakened the traditional marital conventions. The driving force in marriage between young couples is romance and social standing without

recourse to family history or other vital criteria, which were emphasized in the  
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older days.

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### **Age of Marriage**

With the influence of western education, there is change in the age at which young men and women marry. This is due to long periods of time devoted to education and training. This has accidentally reduced some of the health hazards associated with early marriage, especially Vestico Virginal Fistula (VVF). However delayed marriage and subsequent late child births have some adverse effects like giving birth to abnormal children and the mothers may have to go through a caesarian section and other complications due to prolonged labour. Home Doctor (2004) stated that “children born normally and at the right age are more brilliant than those of old age”.

### **Chastity**

Aina and Odebiyi (1997) stated that in the traditional African culture, any woman found not to be a virgin on her wedding night had exposed her family to ridicule and disgrace. A broken calabash is supposed to be sent to the parents of the bride a day after the wedding by the bridegroom family to signify that their new wife was married a virgin. The blood stained bed sheet would be publicly displayed and the parents of the bride complimented.

Many partners today insist that their brides get pregnant before they contract any marriage in order to prove that they are fertile and able to bear children.

### **Size of Family**

Couples are usually expected to commence having children soon after marriage. Family planning was usually not encouraged because children are regarded as social and economic assets. Education has changed this concept. Today educated women decide with their husbands on the size of their families, once they get to the number of children agreed, the woman goes for family planning. This keeps the woman healthy to look after her children and reduce maternal mortality rate. An educated woman would definitely have less number of children than the uneducated one as the knowledge of birth control varies with the educational level of the women.

### **Widowhood**

In many African cultures including Nigeria, it is observed that when a man dies, his dependents (wife and children) are neglected. The beneficiaries of his property are usually his brothers and sisters with his widow having no access. His eldest son from the deceased's older wife or one of his relatives remarries his widow. This widow would as the tradition stipulates goes through much humiliation such as shaving her hair and making her to drink the water used in washing her husband's dead body (mostly to prove her innocence of his death).

She is also made to undergo an extended period of confinement in the house and wearing black clothes for a long period of time after her husband's death.

When a woman dies, her widower does not go through this. A good number of women pressure groups and some non-governmental agencies and organizations are fighting to see that this and other related harmful cultural practices degrading women stop. Those at the vanguard of pushing for a change in these barbaric widowhood practices have been able to do so, due to the exposure of western education. A National Policy on Women was approved by the former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the thrust of government policy on women issues. Some of the goals of the policy according to Amiesamaka (2007) are "the removal of all barriers against the attainment of social justice and equity in society and ensuring the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women."

## **Conclusion**

It should be realized that in the past, parents thought that as far as their daughters were concerned, everything must end in the kitchen. As time went on, parents became aware of the necessity and importance of educating their daughters and of the advantages, which accrue from education. The acquisition of western education has empowered woman not only to challenge some traditional practices which are harmful to women but it has also emboldened them to press for the outright elimination of such practices. A woman today is to be seen and heard. Gone are those days when women were regarded as chattels, properties of their husbands, only good for the kitchen. Despite the above, a woman will always be a woman. The highest paid female professor still goes back to the kitchen to cook for her husband which is where her primary duty lies, As a chief executive officer, she still consults with her male counterparts before taking certain decisions. All these go to show that she is a helpmate like the Holy Bible rightly said.

## **Recommendations**

It is pertinent that women are educated. It will not only emancipate them, it will empower them to take their right of place in the society. It is no gainsaying the goods educating women will have in our family and society at large.

The following recommendations amongst others may be useful

1. To prevent health hazards caused by early marriage, 20 years should be the minimum age for marriage considering the number of years to be spent while in school.
2. More women should be encouraged to go to school so that our children will be properly taken care of, and the best education given to them.
3. Under the universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, there are sanctions for parents who fail to send their children of school age to school

(especially girls). Let there be a monitoring team to see that this is complied with.  
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4. The percentage of women in both federal and state government's executive councils, including the legislation should be increased.
5. Mate selection should be free of parental interference to an extent since it is the partners that know the qualities they want in a man or woman.
6. There should be more enlightenment on family planning programmes. This will help mothers to be healthy.

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