

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This study explored education as an instrument for women empowerment. Women education is relevant as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. Empowerment, leads to the improvement of women's socio-economic status. However, this is not without the attendant inhibitions/barriers which this study discussed and offered recommendations that can make education more result oriented for women empowerment.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Education, Strategies for improving Women Education.

One of the indicators of human capital development is the level of educational attainment of all citizens of a country irrespective of gender. To achieve this, the National Millennium Development Goals report on Nigeria (2004) cited in Alonge, Ige and Osagiobore (2014) is aimed at eliminating gender disparity at all levels of education by 2015 amongst other objectives. It is on this premise that, Anugwom (2009) cited in Ajuzie, Okoye and Mohammed (2012) opined that education is the main tool for imparting skills and attitudes relevant to the contribution of individuals to the development of the society. Imogie (2002) posits that the prosperity of a country depends not only on the abundance of its revenue, nor on the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its citizens that are enlightened through education. It is therefore right to agree with Ajuzie et al.(2012) citing the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004) that states that education is an instrument par excellence in achieving the developmental goals of the nation.

Education, according to Orobosa (2010) in Dienye (2011) as cited in Oghiagbephan (2014) is the process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society which he or she has been born into. Dienye (2011) sees education as involving the deliberate efforts on the part of the educator in developing the personality of individuals and to prepare them for membership of their society. Also, Ukeje (1986) in Dienye (2011) as cited in Oghiagbephan (2014) described education as being powerful, as it is a process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitudes, actions and achievements. It is a process of developing an individual's contributions to social reforms; it is the process of mastering the laws of nature and for utilizing them effectively for the welfare of the individual and for social reconstructions; it is the art of utilizing knowledge for a complete living. Still, education is also perceived in three dimensions. They are development of knowledge, training of mental abilities and development of character (Anyago, 2011).

Education therefore, is relevant in fulfilling economic, political, social, cultural and technological advancement. As observed by Adedokun (2011), education, which is a tool for social mobility, is important for everybody in the community. She further asserts that upward mobility and empowerment are only made possible through the process of education.

She concluded that the point of emphasis of education for all is for everybody in every nation to become literate as literacy brings power, it brings about alteration in the stratification/segmentation of the society. It is a weapon that guarantees equity in the society. It is a means of empowering the vulnerable groups-girls and women whose traditional age-long occupation is supposed to be in the kitchen. This is why Okpoko (2010) cited in Adedokun (2011) believes that women education is a key to development and that empowering women through it, is an asset to her family, immediate communities, the nation and the world at large.

In spite of the fact that women are integral part of every community, their disadvantaged position in some parts of Nigeria particularly when compared with men, and the fact that many of them are ravaged by poverty, make case for efforts geared towards their empowerment necessary. It is against this background that this paper will examine women empowerment through education in Nigeria and some strategies for improving women education.

Theoretical Framework

This write-up will adopt the Education-Economy Linkage theory of Akangbou (1987) cited in Alonge et al.(2014) to direct its focus. The theory argues that there is a two-dimensional relationship between education and economy of a nation. It states that while the economy allocates financial, human and material resources which are needed for the training of manpower to the education sector, the products of the education sector are absorbed into the economy to contribute to its development. The relevance of the

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theory is that education is provided for the citizens (including women) to empower those, who will in turn contribute to the growth and development of the nation.

Women Education.

According to Oxford English Minidictionary (2003), a woman is an adult human female. Aladeselu (2013) describes a woman as the life wire of her family. She is the first nurse, the first teacher, the living food mall, the eye through which a baby sees the world on arrival, through whose hands and tender touch he/she feels the love of God. She is multi-dimensional, multi-talented and multi-tasking. She is the pivot on which the family revolves. Therefore, the best any nation or government can do to improve health and social well being of the smallest unit in the society-the family, is to empower women through education.

The axiom that when you educate a woman, you educate a nation cannot be ignored. According to Enemuo (1999) cited in Ajuzie et al (2012), women education is a multi-dimensional process involving the empowerment and transformation of the economic, socio-psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless. Fadeyiye and Olonegan (2001) described women education as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. This, according to them, involves all efforts that is geared towards harnessing the hidden or untapped potentials in women. They should therefore be encouraged to develop to their fullest potential through education.

Objectives of Women Education.

UNESCO Institute for Education (1995) enumerated the more important objectives of women education to include: Eliminate illiteracy; To develop self-esteem and self-confidence; To have knowledge about their bodies and sexuality; To have the ability to make their own decisions and negotiate; To raise the woman's awareness of their civil rights; To provide skills for income generation; To make participation in community/society more effective; and to prepare them to be good women leaders.

Women Empowerment

Stromquist (1995) defines empowerment as "a process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society". Lazo (1995) describes it as "a process of acquiring, providing, bestowing the resources and the means or enabling the access to a control over such means and resources". Given the above, the term is therefore more relevant to the marginalized groups, the poor, the illiterates, the indigenous communities, and of course, cutting across these categories, the women.

It is therefore clear that empowerment can be observed at different levels. The above-mentioned definitions point to interpersonal relations and institutions as possible sites of empowerment. From a look at the individual level, empowerment can be

described as “the ability to direct and control one’s own life”. It must be noted that such an individual empowerment of women is attained in relationship to the larger society. This is a process in which women gain control over their own lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of the society. Self-empowerment means that women gain autonomy, are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in the economic, political and social decision-making process.

According to Aladeselu (2013), to empower women, is to increase their access to basic education, basic healthcare, loans and micro-finance to assist them in their businesses. It is also to give them voice in decisions that affect them, to involve them in development activities in the community, to give them sense of worth, and treat them as equal humans as men not as property that can be inherited, disposed off at will not as a slave. She emphasized further that when women are not empowered, they contribute less to national development. That disempowerment of women has led to poverty of not only the women, but the families that depend on them.

Strategies for Improving Women Education.

It is no gain saying that “when you empower women, you are definitely building a nation”. This statement connotes also the fact that “investing in women development is globally acknowledged as one in the right direction, without which any attempt at nation building would flounder and run counter-productive (Aladeselu, 2013). Women contribution to development is thus felt not just in the homes but also in the public spheres. However, according to Nwaji (2011) cited in Ajuzie et al (2012), it is worthy to note that the early formal educational curriculum was not designed to train women for top leadership positions. Their education was designed to empower them in taking care of domestic responsibilities. Achume (2004) opine that women were not in medicine, politics, engineering, law and environmental studies. This essentially have resulted in shortage of qualified women for top level leadership posts and denied them opportunities in formal employment for years.

Nonetheless, women empowerment is a useful tool in development because it emphasizes the idea of women as active agents in development strategies, rather than passive recipients of development strategies. Consequent upon this, Alonge et al (2014) enumerated educational strategies which should be put in place to improve women education in Nigeria for national development. These strategies include:

Increasing Access of Female Children to Education:

This can be achieved through increased advocacy and orientation of the masses in rural and traditional communities especially on the need to educate the girl-child in formal schools.

Sustaining Female Children in Educational Institutions:

Government should endeavour to tackle the barriers to female/women education in Nigeria. Such barriers include school dropout, societal and institutional

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discriminations, early marriage and cultural practices. Other barriers according to Edet and Udom (2014) are poverty, demand for girls household labour, teenage pregnancy, current security challenges in some parts of the country, inadequate school infrastructure, poorly qualified teachers etc. The government can overcome this through provision of scholarships and bursaries for female children; supply of infrastructure, equipments and instructional materials to schools. Recruitment and deployment of qualified teachers to schools for effective teaching and learning should be prioritized by the Federal and States Ministries of Education. The concentration of qualified and large number of teachers in urban areas at the expense of schools in remote and rural communities should be discouraged.

Revitalization of Adult and Non-Formal Education Centres:

This can be achieved through the establishment of more adult literacy centres across the country. National Agency for Formal and Non-Formal Education should step up its advocacy on the need for illiterate women to enroll in such centres. These centres should be equipped with modern infrastructures, instructional materials and qualified teachers. The curriculum should be redesigned in a robust way to accommodate the needs of adult learners. Vocational and entrepreneurial skills training centres for rural women should not be mere political wish. They should be adequately funded to achieve the goal of self-reliance for women especially. Government should also establish the National “Empowerment Fund” for economic activities for women entrepreneurs as well as establishing and strengthening the financial institutions where they can access loans for small and medium scale enterprises at reduced interest rate.

Additionally, Asaolu (2010) cited in Adedokun et al (2011) is of the view that vocational education must be an integral part of the education to be planned for women, for it is this that will set them on the part of self reliance; a stage whereby they will be able to add voice to their faces. Iogwu (2010) cited in Adedokun et al (2011) also believes that educated adults empower their families to develop socially, economically and politically. This is why enlightened families form the bedrock of community and national development.

Conclusion

Empowerment makes a person able to choose and to demand. It makes the person able to choose her goals, generate opportunities to reach the goals and determine the overall direction of her life. This makes the notion of empowerment a fascinating and powerful one. In many communities, women have no possibility to choose their own life goals and this indicates a state of powerlessness. Empowerment enables a woman to gain relative strength as a result of having choices and bargaining power. The consequences being her ability to demand attention from those concerned, especially decision and policy makers, to generate the appropriate positive responses, reduction of vulnerability, reduction or elimination of exploitability, availability and use of social

services and resources. Ultimately, empowerment should lead to the improvement of women's socio-economic status. As women's education has become one of the key development objectives of this century, the concept of empowerment has been tied to the range of activities undertaken by and for women in different areas, education included. It is the underlying assumption of this write-up that if women understand their conditions, know their rights and learned skills traditionally denied them, by having access to education and training, empowerment which will facilitate meaningful contribution to national development would follow.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that:

Government should mount-up vigorous campaign in various communities through seminars and workshops to sensitize women on the importance of acquiring education and training for empowerment and self-reliance.

Government should make vocational and entrepreneurial education an integral part of education planned for women.

Government should enact enabling laws to abolish societal and institutional barriers to the girl-child/women education in the country.

Consequent upon the prevailing security challenges in some parts of the country, the government should put in place enough security protection in and around the schools.

The private sector should also work with women groups in giving them some training and start up-capital to do businesses.

Government should revive and fund adult education and non-formal education centres to encourage women to access education through it.

Incentives like scholarship, free school books and uniforms could be provided to the girl-child/women to encourage and stimulate their interest and stay in school.

Government at all levels should continue to narrow the gap between men and women appointments and employment opportunities.

Empowerment connotes freedom of expression. Apart from financial autonomy, government should have a listening ear to the yearnings and aspirations of women on matters that concern their welfare.

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Women should also be encouraged adequately to participate in politics by being accorded a level playing ground with their male counterparts.

The society should abolish cultural beliefs and traditional practices that make women have limited access to economic rights and privileges.

The government through education, should modify the curriculum where necessary, to expunge those aspects that carry huge dose of gender stereotype that reflects the societal expectation of each gender.

Parents should send their children to school based on the ability of the child irrespective of the gender of the child.

Teachers as executors of educational policies should not stereotype subjects as has been the case, rather students should be encouraged to choose their subjects based on their ability and interest.

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