

GENDER EQUITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

By

DR. OKERE, JOSEPH EJIMOGU

Department of Educational Foundations and Administration
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

DR. OBIUKWU, KINGSLEY

Department of Educational Foundations and Administration
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

NJOKU MAURICE

Department of Educational Foundations and Administration
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

Abstract

The paper investigated gender equity, human development and the Nigerian education system. By means of conceptual and analytical framework, the paper explicated the relationship between gender equity, human development and the Nigerian education system. The paper found out that education in the traditional Nigerian society was not provided equally between the male and their female counterparts- a factor that has prefaced the precarious state of the womanhood in the present Nigerian society. The writers noted that this state of affairs has implications for the Nigerian tertiary education in such areas as promoting of equity in tertiary education, expansion of access and scope of tertiary education and intensifying and diversifying the curricula offerings of higher education for high level man power development. Based on the findings of the study, the paper concluded that equalizing educational opportunities by implementing the educational policies on women empowerment and by embarking on economic planning based on productive and participative welfare economy.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Human Development, Nigerian Tertiary education and Implications

Introduction:

A nation's developmental strides can be measured by the amount of opportunities, privileges and rights enjoyed by its citizens. This means that equal treatment should be meted to both males and females in all spheres of life.

Gender equity has become a contentious issue right from the classical Age in which Plato and Aristotle advocated equal education for both males and females. It was thought that the education of both sexes would give them opportunities to contribute to national development in their later period.

However, the issue of gender parity has continued to attract attention at both national and international levels. This concern for gender parity in education is a healthy one considering

the fact that education deals with initiating human beings into their cultural, social and political environment so that they can advance it.

In discussing the issue of gender equity, Uzowulu in Okere (2017) believes that the discrimination against women is one of the severe indictments of the contemporary human society. He contended that this ugly development had led the United Nations to declare a “Decade for women” in the late seventies, which was backed up with a charter that stated the World Body’s faith in “fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and on equal rights for men and women”.

In Nigeria, the national policy on women empowerment was launched in (2006) which gave further credence to agitations for women liberation.

Despite the declaration and the legislation against discrimination on the basis of sex by many countries, Uzowulu argued that the cardinal objectives have not been realized hence women still assemble in different parts of the world to discuss strategies to empower themselves. This empowerment is necessitated by the fact that men have rigged women out of power unjustly and interfered with their personal rights illegally. Furthermore, past Nigerian leaders paid lip service to women empowerment because they failed to link political and economic growth with human development- a concept which deals with the process of people’s choice: democracy, longevity, knowledge, decent living standards, adult literacy and real per capita income adjusted for purchasing power.

To realize this noble objective calls for a reform in the nation’s education system to make it accessible to all Nigerians from the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Ogundele and Oghaijafor in Okere (2018) believed that reform agenda refers to government’s act of changing the ways, the systems and how institutions are run in a country. They further stated that reform anchors on learning from the past and building on the present to secure the future. The goal of the reform programme should be to introduce efficient and effective institutional framework for stable growth and development (Ihonvbere, in Okere 2021).

This paper therefore seeks to examine the necessity of gender equality as a vital tool for human development in Nigeria. The paper is divided into three sections. Section one deals with the concept of gender equity and how it is related to human development. Section two examines human development, gender equity and Nigerian education system while section three captures the conclusion and recommendation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Meaning of Gender Equity

Gender means different things to different people. Acholonu in Okere (2017:10) defined gender as: the socially constructed roles ascribed to males and females. These roles, which are learned, change over time and vary widely within and between cultures.

Acholonu believes that agitation for women’s right as reflected in Mary Astell’s “Some Reflections upon Marriage” and John Stuart Mill’s-“The Subjection of Women” are books written in defence of the rights of women. She further stated that the agitation for women’s right has created the-gender question on issues that seek to create equality of opportunity between men and women in all aspects of human development.

Henslin in Acholonu (2002), believes that gender refers to what a group considers proper for its males and females. He further stated that while sex is inherited as either male or female, gender is learned as you are socialized into specific behaviours and attitudes.

The foregoing agrees with Reiley in Acholonu (2002) who posits that gender shapes the lives of all people in all societies. According to Reiley, gender issues affect a people's social life including schooling, social roles and the power and authority we command. He further stated that gender issues are the society's means of sorting sexes that is also responsible for the distorted roles which women play today as wives and mothers thus giving rise to gender inequality in society. This was corroborated by John Stuart Mill as in Acholonu (2002:86) who said that:

The principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes- the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and that it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other.

Gender equity therefore, represents measures/policies aimed at eliminating discrepancies/discrimination in treatment between men and women in such areas as employment opportunities, political positions, educational positions, health and other social welfare positions.

Concept of Human Development

Human development is a concept which involves a wide range of issues such as ability to live a long and happy life, ability to make choice, be educated and have freedom and opportunities. According to Okere, (2019) human development refers to the organizing principle for meeting human development goals. Human development goals encompass economic growth and increase in per capita income, increase in human capabilities in terms of higher standards of health, education and knowledge, self-respect and the ability to participate actively in community life.

Okere further stated that human development cuts across technological, economic, social and political aspect of human life. He also stated that for a country to be technologically advanced, the country should have the capacity to utilize the products of science and technology to meet her needs. This translates to the country's ability to produce her necessities internally and to rely less on foreign and imported goods and services.

Concept of Nigerian Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is the education received after secondary education in the universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), remarks that the goals of tertiary education are to:

1. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training
2. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival society
3. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment

4. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society
5. Promote and encourage scholarship and community services
6. Forge and cement national unity and
7. Promote national and international understanding and interactions.

Historical Perspective of Education and Gender Equity in Retrospect

According to Ohueri in Okere (2018), gender equity in educational provisions differs among countries. In the United States of America, the Negroes (black race) attend different schools from their white counterparts. Some states in the USA administer universal education on a state basis. Schools for Negroes are inferior in staffing, equipment and in prestige to the white schools. This means that the Negroes are denied access on irrelevant grounds to a quality of provision that should be available to all.

In Nigeria, the government has tried and is still trying to promote equity in the provision of education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is one of the strategies of the federal government of Nigeria to make education available to all Nigerians irrespective of real or imagined barriers. Three main components of UBE include: Universal, Basic and Education. Universal means that the educational provision is available to all-the rich, poor and the physically fit and physically challenged, the brilliant, the dull... the term basic is related to the base, take off point, fundamental, essential...while education connotes the transmission of knowledge, skills and understanding from generation to generation. Basic education makes it possible for higher education to take place.

Education of the women in the traditional African society received little attention compared to their male counterparts.

According to Fafunwa in Okere (2016:47)

While the boys were receiving rigorous training on the farm under the instruction of their fathers, the girls were undergoing training at home under the strict supervision of their mothers, they were taught to take care of children, prepare food, make clothes, wash utensils and take care of the dwelling place. All these tasks were simple and taught with simple methods.

Gibson in Ofoego (2016) said that the role of women in traditional African society varied prominently among different countries in the continent. He noted that family centered values coupled with economic and social imperative had a man as the head of the family while the care and upbringing of children were left in the hands of women. He further stated that women and men were expected to perform different tasks.

Gibson in Okere (2015) also noted that many African women work for more than 15 hours a day in underdeveloped rural villages with few or no resources, without formal education and without adequate healthcare, sanitation, water supplies, transportation or other facilities. He further stated that African women are very active economically particularly in the agricultural sector and in food processing, trade and home industries. He however, regretted that their

activities have largely been in the informal sector making most of their contributions invisible, unpaid for and undervalued.

Bohannon and Curtin in Okere (2015) believed that the roles of women and men were not thought to be superior or inferior but as equal parts of the whole social relationship. He posited that the division of labour between men and women had created specific handicaps for women. According to him, the colonial period provided new frontiers for African advancement in educational, legal, administrative and commercial system. However, these openings favoured the male folks in contrast to their women counterpart. Women were the mainstay of food and agricultural production, market trading small scale processing of agricultural products, and weaving and dress-making. They were equally engaged in food storage and selling, transportation, brewing and selling beer in (Botswana). According to Bohannon and Curtin, women have continued to make significant impacts on the social, economic and political landscape of the Nigerian economy but their role has continued to be subsisted under the male counterparts.

Gender Equity, Human Development and Nigerian Education System

Education connotes a family of processes, achievements and tasks. First, education involves initiation into what a community considers to be worthwhile. Being educated therefore, represents a group of achievements which are internally related to a family of tasks. An educational system or a school system can be seen from an external point of view in which it refers to a method of preparing people for jobs in a community. To an individual, it is an avenue to power and prestige in a community. Questions relating to access and distribution of education opportunities are among the explosive issues in today's educational system.

Education in Nigeria is conducted in line with the overall philosophy of Nigerian education and the national policies on education.

Rousseau in Okere (2018) had argued that a good educational system is effective in bringing about social reforms to the entire society. In his two essays; the discourse on the Sciences and Arts and on the Origin of Inequality, Rousseau attacked the influence of the society on the individual which he said had deprived him of his freedom and made him to conform to the social orders. He argued that education should be the instrument for social reform in the society and he encouraged government and all stakeholders in education to play their part in reforming the education system which he thought had moved too far away from societal aspiration. His model of education was therefore anchored on the social contract in which he hoped that the educational system would restore individual freedom, rights and privileges commensurate to societal development.

Rousseau equally observed the role of teaching method and developmental stages of the child as important components of a child's education. To him, teaching should be adapted to the stages of mental development of the child and should take into account his readiness to learn something new. He believed that the child's education should be based on his experiences, needs and interests. Rousseau's educational scheme was divided into four stages namely;

- i. **Infancy** (0-2yrs) where the child is likened to an animal. He becomes more conscious of himself than when he was in the womb. His education would base on physical and social reforms and unconscious imitation.
- ii. **Childhood** (2-12 years) the child is ignorant of moral laws. He is guided by physical necessity.
- iii. **Pre-adolescence** (12-15) the child is approaching adult life. Personal satisfaction becomes his driving force.
- iv. **Adolescence** (15-25) the child is awakening of sex functions and the beginning of true social life. Beauty and true goodness begin to take definite shape.

These characteristics have implications for the education of the education of the child.

Plato in his educational theory in the Republic on equal education for both sexes stressed that only those youths who have passed their tests on Quadrivium-Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy should be allowed to move to another educational stage. For Plato, the education of citizens should account for differences in human aptitude and interest.

Orji in Okere (2018) wrote that Plato regarded justice as the primary objective of his ideal state; in which man can act together in harmony according to their natural endowments. Based on this thought, education was dispensed to citizens in regard to the characteristic virtue of every class of citizens comprising: temperance for the common people, courage for soldiers and wisdom for governors. He further stated that the educational classification had underpinning that every person in the state irrespective of sex and social rank should receive the training and education which will enable him to play the part for which he is best filled.

Okere (2015) said that human development requires injecting the right kind of skills, attitude, knowledge and understanding which would predispose the right mindset and character for individual benefit and societal development.

Dewey in Okere (2017) posits that human beings are developed into the kind of citizens expected of them by the society. This is made possible through the right kind of education.

The Nigerian citizens especially the women need education to be integrated into the Nigerian society as alluded to by the Nigerian philosophy of education.

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), education is an instrument par excellence for effecting national development. This philosophy seeks to make Nigerians live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice; and to promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.

Following these guiding principles and premises, Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system. (FRN, 2013).

Nigerian philosophy of education encompasses the major concepts; integration of all citizens, entrenchment and internalization of enduring societal value system, equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens and socio-political and economic self-sufficiency. (Nwosu, 2013).

In consonance with the foregoing, the policy document also identified five (5) national goals, aims and objectives for education at different levels of our educational system. These goals are:

1. A free and democratic society;
2. A just and egalitarian society;
3. A united, strong and self-reliant nation;
4. A great and dynamic economy; and
5. A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (FRN, 2013).

Out of the five national goals as presented above, a just and egalitarian society runs close to gender equity. A just society is one where the citizens have fair and equal treatment. Egalitarianism is the concept of equality before the law.

Akinpelu in Okere (2021) posits that justice and egalitarianism are procedural values for sharing national resources for the reconciliation of divergent interest and for securing harmony and peace among conflicting interests and interest groups. That means that injustice and discrimination are against human growth and they can result to conflicts, strikes, suspicion and setbacks in human development. In an egalitarian society, equal educational opportunity for all citizens is germane for personal and human development. The quota system of admission and catchment areas, the UBE programme, Unity schools, nomadic/migrant education to mention a few are aimed at egalitarianism in Nigerian education. These programmes are necessary for enlightened citizenry which is a basic component of human development.

Mezieobi (2015) has harped on the need for Nigeria's national ideology to be in line with the Nigerian philosophy of education. He maintained that such an ideology must not be government-dependent but productive and participative welfare state in which the Nigerian people in consonance with Nigeria's social and cultural peculiarities and realities and in the spirit of self-reliance, individually and collectively work very hard to better their life conditions and welfare.

Ocho in Okere (2018) believes that education is a process through which human beings develop to become useful to themselves and society.

Ofoego and Okere (2018) believe that an educated person is one fully engaged in two broad activities,

- i. The intellectual activity, which involves the quest for knowledge and truth and;
- ii. the practical reason or activity with which one conducts his social and moral life, his political life and become a good citizen.

Also, Akinpelu in Ofoego and Okere (2018:28) has noted that an educated man is one "...who shows evidence of a well integrated personality...he is economically efficient, socially and politically competent, morally acceptable and intellectually and culturally sophisticated".

From the foregoing, the role of Nigerian tertiary education in promoting gender equity cannot be over emphasized. The Nigeria education system recognizes primary education as fundamental to the laying of a solid basis for scientific and reflective thinking, citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society. It

further adumbrates the moulding of character and the development of sound attitude and morals in the child.

As a critical aspect of the Nigerian education system, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) noted that the specific objectives of Universal Basic Education (UBE) are to:

1. Develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education;
2. Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
3. Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system and;
4. Ensure the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills.

From the foregoing, considerations of gender equity in educational provisions should be based on relevant criteria such as the following:

1. Age, aptitude and ability of the child;
2. Type of education such as grammar, technical and modern;
3. Nature of education-intrinsic and extrinsic values;
4. Quality of life.

Following the philosophy of the Nigerian education system which aims at developing the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the integration of the individual into his community, secondary education prepares the individual for useful living within the society and higher education.

Given the philosophical slant of the Nigerian tertiary education which can be summarized as developing the intellectual, the moral and the physical capacities of the educated Nigerian to appreciate their local and external environment for successful living and for contribution to national development and community services; the role of the Nigerian education towards gender equality cannot be over emphasized.

The achievement of the above objectives places enormous responsibilities on tertiary education. The repositioning of the Nigerian education system will have implications for the Nigerian tertiary education.

Implications for the Nigerian Tertiary education:

Education as a process of human development requires careful planning and implementation of policies in order to realize societal expectations. This will necessitate the following implications for the education system:

1. Provision of equal educational opportunities for all citizens and educational facilities and materials should be made available to all.
2. Provision of adult education programmes, socio-political and economic empowerment for women.
3. Expansion of access and scope of tertiary education. Increase in the number of existing universities in both public and private will result in more access to university education and the development of higher level human capital formation.
4. Improvement of Quality of tertiary education. Quality in tertiary education can be ensured through relevant staff development programmes such as TET-FUND, in-

service training and the improvement of conducive learning environment. This requires provision of infrastructural facilities, functional laboratories and libraries.

5. Promotion of equity in tertiary education. Egalitarianism requires fairness and equality in admission policies. It means that the poor and the physically challenged should be recognized. Special admission quota to females, implementation of the Beijing affirmative action and the award of bursary and scholarship schemes for females can promote gender friendly admission policies and encourage human development.
6. Encouragement of skills acquisition and counselling services. Skill acquisition in various fields of human endeavour and guidance counselling services are pre-requisites for human development in tertiary education. Counselling services provide attitudinal changes in students which are necessary for building a strong and self reliant economy for societal growth and development.
7. Intensifying and diversifying the curricula offerings of higher education for high level manpower development
8. Making professional courses to reflect national requirements; and making all students to become part of the all-round improvement in university education through offering general courses such as History of ideas, Philosophy of knowledge and Nationalism.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that tertiary education is critical to equalizing opportunities between men and women in the Nigerian society. It provides the intellectual and the moral skills needed for playing active role in the society.

Therefore, higher education for both sexes should be of quality and should be provided to both male and female in a manner to arouse the productive and participative ingenuity of the educated public in consonance with Nigeria's social and cultural imperatives.

Recommendations

1. Gender equality should be emphasized in the teaching and learning process
2. Sex education should form part of the school curriculum
3. Education should be provided in equal basis to all irrespective of gender or any other real or imagined barrier
4. Education in Nigeria should be based on the philosophical stand-point of the National Policy on women
5. There is need for gender sensitivity training and education
6. Economic planning should be based on productive and participative welfare economy.

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