

GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the concepts of gender, education and gender inequality in education. The purpose of this paper is to ascertain theoretically the implications of gender inequality in education for socioeconomic development in Nigeria. Through content analyses, the paper identified education as a fundamental human right irrespective of gender or any other reason. Furthermore, it identified education as a catalyst for socioeconomic growth and as a strong driver of poverty reduction through promotion of human capital development among others. Thus, the paper observed that gender inequality in education has both social and economic consequences for Nigeria. Socially, gender inequality in education makes women inferior to their male counterparts and thus exposes them to all manners of marginalization, exploitation and domestic violence. Economically, gender inequality in education excludes women from competitive and lucrative workforce because of their poor educational qualification which are necessary in certain areas of the economy. The paper recommended among others that education being a key factor in socioeconomic development of every nation, the Federal Republic of Nigeria should criminalize illiteracy and inequality in education based on gender discrimination; declare state of emergency in education sector; provide free education across all levels of education: primary, secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, inequality, Education, Socio-economic development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Education is an essential tool for social change and economic development. It is one of the greatest assets of any nation and the best gift parents or anybody can give to a child. The Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN (2004) recognizes education as an instrument of national development. Accordingly, the FRN notes that education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most important instrument of change. Consequent upon this affirmation, the FRN (2004:7) states that “every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal education opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her ability.” This shows that education, in principle, is open to every Nigerian. However, in practice there exists gender inequality in education.

Inequality in educational opportunities and attainment between males and females in Nigeria is gender based among other factors such as family background, socioeconomic factors and so on. Gender refers to societies’ division of their members into two classes and ascribing them with different roles. This division is the origin of gender inequality. Gender roles are attitude

and activities that a society or cultural group ascribe to her members based on their biological differences as males or females. Culturally, males are viewed as superior to females. This attitude of mind forms the foundation upon which gender inequality is built. Iloegbunam (2006:3) notes that:

One of the ironies of history is the fact that despite the roles women play both at home and the society, they have remained unnoticed and even belittled. This is borne out of the wrong notion that women's education ends in the kitchen, childbearing and caring.

Therefore, women are believed only to be seen and not heard. Accordingly Omoregie and Ihensekhien (2009:3) observed that this discrimination against women "has grossly affected female enrolment in education, especially in the Northern region of Nigeria".

Against this backdrop, females are not given equal educational opportunities in Nigeria, especially in the Northern geo-political zone. The authors further noted that women are culturally pushed to the second class status and consequently relegated to mere agents of domestic engagements at home. This apathy arising from gender inequality has also affected education in Nigeria, leading to gender inequality in education (Omoregie & Ihensekheim, 2009). The authors further note that if drastic measures are not taken to address this problem, education in Nigeria may turn out to be all male affairs in the future as the females are now becoming petty traders, rural farmers, domestic and unskilled labourers.

The purpose of this paper therefore, is to explore the concept of gender, meaning of education, concept of gender inequality in education and to ascertain theoretically, the implications of gender inequality in education for socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Concept of Gender

Gender and gender related issues are relatively new areas that are generating interest among researchers. This has given rise to various definitions of the term, gender. Bryce (2011) defined gender in its narrowest sense as a socially constructed sex, be it female or male. Bruce and Yearley (2010:2) seem to agree with Bryce when they noted that gender is commonly used while referring to "the distinction between females and males on the basis of anatomy". These views seem to be defective and narrow as they are restricted to the biological make ups of male and female. Afolabi (2012) introduces a new insight into the meaning of gender by stating that the term has been variously used to refer to a collection of the characteristics that are culturally associated with maleness and femaleness. Here sociocultural dimension has come into consideration. This is an intellectual shift from the narrow minded definition of gender based on biological features of male and female. Against this background, Becker (2016) defines gender as a system of social organization with a set of behavioural prescriptions that are believed to follow from biological sex characteristics.

Corroborating Becker's definition, Haig (2010:88) defines gender as "the range of physical, mental and behavioural characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between masculinity and femininity." According to Ayodeji (2010), gender is the socially constructed ways of being male or female, man or woman. This differentiation between male and female, man and woman is based on their roles and expectations in the society. So, gender is a socially created

concept anchored on division of labour and differences in behavior pattern between male and female, men and women in any given society. As socially created concept, Ugboaja and Uzoka (2011) note that gender is the society constructed roles, responsibilities ascribed to males and females by different societies. These roles are socially constructed and socially learned behavior and expectations associated with males and females (Okeke, 2000). In his own view, Edward (2013) notes that gender refers to the sum of cultural values, attitudes, roles, practice and characteristics based on sex. Many scholars agree that gender is socially and culturally created. Hence Ohia (2018) defines gender as a sociocultural division between males and females; qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally than biologically determined. Hannan (2013) provides what seems to be a comprehensive definition of the concept as the attributes and opportunities associated with male or female, and the sociocultural relationship between men and women, and boys and girls, as well as the relationship between different groups of men and different groups of women. The author further states that these attributes, opportunities and relationship are socially constructed and learned through socialization process. In all, gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman and man in different contexts.

Gender is therefore a psycho-social concept with cultural colouration. The different roles that men and women play in society and benefits and privileges ascribed to the roles are created and sustained through traditions, customs, conventions, norms and regulations which are transmitted to generations across time and space (Ayodeji, 2010). In the context of this paper, gender refers to sociocultural roles ascribed to the male and female members of a society. It varies from one society to another. This sociocultural role differentiation and dichotomy between the male and female members of Nigerian society appears to be responsible for the perceived gender inequality in education.

Concept of Education

Education is a key to socioeconomic and political development of both an individual person and the society at large. For the individuals, it equips them with new knowledge, skills, capabilities, insight and confidence to deal with everyday challenges of life. And for the society, it helps in building up the society through the general contributions of her members. Strevens (2007) defines education as a system deliberately designed to equip individual with the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes which will help them live worthy and happy life in the society. Thus, education impacts positively on both the individuals and the society.

Corroborating the above definition, Ocho (2005) notes that education is generally perceived as a potent instrument for the promotion and facilitation of national development. Nwankwo (2005) avers that education is the greatest force that can be used for the promotion of social, economic and political development. Therefore, the ability of man to use the things around him to improve his life and the society depends on education; type, quality level and depth of education received (Ocho, 2005). The author further points out that the ability of a nation to grow, develop and achieve stability under peaceful and cohesive environment depends on the quality and extent of implementation of its educational system. Education therefore embraces all those activities and processes which the state employs to transmit her values, knowledge, skills, aptitude and attitude to her citizens to enable them develop their potentials and contribute their own quota for the development of the state.

In all ramifications, education plays a very important role in both human, and socio-economic life of individuals and nations. In other words, education helps in broadening both the individual and the societal world view. It provides a level playing ground for all members of the society to strive for optimal performance and attainment of their social, economic and political potentials. According to Ugwu (2015), when an individual's abilities or potentials are developed, he can then undertake specific task that will improve the welfare of the individual and the society. Individuals are no longer thus judged by their accidents of birth, and backgrounds but by their ability to contribute positively to the growth of the society. It eliminates all manmade barriers such as gender based discrimination and injustice that hitherto have remained a cog in the wheel of social and economic development of Nigeria.

Concept of Gender Inequality in Education

In a general parlance, inequality between persons is a situation where people in the society do not enjoy equal rights and privileges based on social status or other factors. Inequality among members of a society is as old as man and society. In Nigeria, inequality exists in different forms: social, economic, educational, gender inequality and so on. This paper focuses on gender inequality in education.

Gender inequality in education is a glass ceiling unjustly placed over women, depriving them of educational opportunities and privileges which their male counterparts enjoy in the society. Accordingly, Klasen and Lamanna (2009) say that gender inequality in education refers to unequal opportunity in education of females due to their gender. It is very much pronounced in Nigeria. To this effect, gender inequality in education entails unequal participation of women as their male counterparts in education.

Gender inequality in education is not based on biological superiority of men over women but rather, it is socially created. It is a result of men's superiority complex over women. Therefore, it is manmade and oppressive in all its intents. In many societies, women are viewed as property belonging to their male husbands. They are treated as subordinates, possessing limited rights and privileges (Omoregie and Ihensekhien, 2009). Consequently, gender inequality in education leads to disparity in the distribution of wealth distribution between men and women. In terms of economic activities, women are often not allowed to engage in any meaningful economic productive ventures because of their poor educational background. They are confined to domestic chores, subsistence farming and other menial jobs in the society.

Gender inequality in education leads to unequal distribution of wealth between men and women. Not until recently, most women could not enroll in schools and women's participation in paid labour force outside the home was limited. Odozi(2012) notes that the dimension of gender inequality, that excludes women from schooling is rather detrimental to national economic progress and development. This is because it denies women access to necessary economic productive resources, activities, benefits and so subject them to early marriage which deny them educational opportunities.

Implications of Gender Inequality in Education for Socioeconomic Development of Nigeria

Gender inequality in education is one of the banes of socioeconomic development of Nigeria. Obviously, it is a key factor in producing a wide range of gender based inequality in Nigeria. Arguably, gender inequality in education lowers females' social development and economic productivity. Ultimately, this has some consequences on both the family and national economic growth. For example, in a household where the mother is educated, children, especially girls are more likely to attend school. Conversely, household where a mother is not educated, such mother may not know the value of education and as such, may not encourage or send her children to school. Again, gender inequality in education increases or exposes women to more domestic violence. This is because in their ignorance women are intimidated and handled without respect by their husbands. On the economic level, gender inequality in education excludes women from the mainstream national economic activities of Nigeria. It not only deprives women of the opportunity of making their contribution to the development and growth of their personal economy but also reduces the gross national income. It does so by artificially reducing the pool of talents among female genders thereby excluding them from workforce that are needed for national income growth (Klasen and Lamanna, 2009).

Furthermore, gender inequality in education creates gap in human capital development and equal employment opportunity. Based on theoretical literatures, gender inequality in education reduces the average amount of human capital in a society and thus harms economic performance. It does so by artificially restricting the pool of talents from which to draw from education, thereby excluding potentially and highly qualified girls and taking less qualified boys instead (Dollar and Gatti, 2009). Again, for competitive economy to emerge and grow, women need to be educated and there must be no barrier to their employment in economic sector. Therefore, gender inequality in education will exclude women in economic activities and thus reduce the ability of Nigeria to grow a strong economy.

Corollary to gap in human capital development and equal employment opportunities occasioned by gender inequality in education is the emergence of a wide rate of poverty among women. According to Ajani (2008), women are marginalized in their access to social and economic resources compared to men, rendering them relatively poorer than their male counterparts. Similarly, Odozi (2012) observes that inequality in education has some socio-economic implications for women. According to the author, women lag behind men in most indicators of socio-economic development and they constitute the majority of the poor, the unemployed and the socially disadvantaged. Again, women are the hardest hit by the current economic recession with more rural women than men living below the poverty line.

Closely related to the emergence of a wide rate of poverty among women is that gender inequality in education exposes women to exploitation and cheap labour. It is evident that society recognizes and rewards highly educated persons with more pay or salary than the uneducated ones. This leads to gender pay gaps. Blecker and Seguino (2002) note that gender inequality in education leads to gender gaps in employment, particularly in formal sectors, where employers will prefer educated workers and thus not consider applications of uneducated ones who most often are women. Conversely, the authors said that if there are large barriers to female unemployment or gender gap in pay, some parents and girls might decide that education of girls is not lucrative which might lead to lower demands for female

education and thus lead to increase in gender inequality in education in Nigeria (Blecker and Seguinto, 2002). This situation will surely impart negatively on the national economic growth.

Furthermore, gender inequality in education reduces economic growth by denying women opportunity of making their own contributions to the growth of the economy. Knowles, Lorgelly and Owen (2002) observe that gender inequality in education has a large statistically significant negative effect on the level of gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, Klasen (2002) notes that gender inequality in education has a negative impact on economic growth by lowering the average level of participation of women in economic activities. In Nigeria for example, some women are naturally and equally endowed with many potentials such as intelligence, creativity, dexterity, productivity and physical strength, just like their male counterparts (Nwaeze, 2016). In some rare cases, women are exceptionally more talented than men. Unfortunately, some of these women were denied education because of the glass ceiling placed over them by the society. In this way, gender inequality in education robs them the opportunity to be educated; to be developed and to actualize their potentials. This denial of course has some consequences on socio-economic development of Nigeria. For example, there are many Nigerian women who out of advantage of family background and upbringing were given unfettered educational opportunities like their male counterparts who have broken national and international records in their fields of specialization or other spheres of life. Such women include; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. She is a renowned Nigerian economist and one time two term finance minister of Nigeria. she was one of the managing directors of the World Bank before she was called upon by the Nigeria ex-president, Olusegun Obasanjo to come back to Nigeria to help build up the economy. She also held the position of foreign minister of Nigeria in 2006. Presently, she has been nominated by President Muhammadu Buhari to vie for the prestigious post of Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Another woman of both national and international recognition and reputation is Oby Ezekwesili. She is as fiery as she is intelligent. She is a trained accountant, a co-founder of Transparency International and serviced as one of the pioneer directors of the Global Anti-corruption body based in Berlin, Germany. She also served as Federal Minister of Solid Minerals and at another period, served as Federal minister of education during the regime of Olusegun Obasanjo. Worthy of mention is Florence Ita Giwa who made notable landmarks in Nigeria. She also served as ex-president Olusegun Obasanjo's special Adviser on National Assembly matters.

In the field of aviation is Kimberly Anyadike. She is a Nigerian and a pilot from Compton, California. In 2009, at the age of 15, she became the youngest Nigerian American woman to complete transcontinental flight across the United States, from Los Angeles, California to Newport News, Virginia (Wikipedia, 2010). On the local scene, captain Chinyere Kalu was the first female pilot in Nigeria and in 2011, appointed the rector and chief executive of the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT), which is the largest aviation training institute in Africa (Nwaeze, 2016).

In the world of creativity and literary works, we have such icon as Chiamamanda Ngozi Adichie. According to Nwaeze (2016), Adichie is Nigerian novelist, nonfiction writer and activist. She is also known as the most prominent of critically acclaimed young Anglophone authors in Nigeria. In the same vein, Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa fondly and

popularly known as Flora Nwapa as well as mother of Modern African Literature took the world of literary works by storm in 1966, with her novel “EFURU.” Her work was among the first English language novels by a woman from Africa, and sequel to her establishment of Tata Press, she became the African woman publisher. The relevance of their works is revealed in their high recommendation in the education of the young in Nigerian society.

In the field of medicine, we have such notable woman like Elizabeth Abimbola Awoji who being the first female physician in Nigeria earned her medical degree in 1993 from the University of Dublin, Cafreys college and advanced from junior medical officer at the Massey Street Hospital Lagos to chief consultant and Medical Director at the same hospital, which she held till 1969 (Osewa, 2016). According to the author, she was initially appointed as a senior specialist gynaecologist and obstetrician in 1962 by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health. Osewa further noted that Aloma Mukhtar made history by becoming the first female Chief Justice of Nigeria in 2012 and the youngest Judge in Nigeria at the age of 32.

Another distinguished woman was late Prof Dora Nkem Akunyili. She was the first woman to receive the award of Transparency International Integrity in Africa. Osewa noted that Akunyili was a senior lecturer and consultant pharmacologist in the college of medicine, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) Enugu campus, before she became the director general (DG) of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Through dogged and unparallel commitment to eradicate counterfeit drugs and unsafe food in Nigeria, she gained international recognition and won hundreds of awards. Prior to her death, she was appointed the Nigeria’s honourable Minister of Information and communication.

Another notable woman that made a landmark in Nigerian society was Prof Grace Alele-Williams who happened to be the first female Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin in Nigeria. Her academic pedigree is overwhelmingly impressive. She studied at Queens college, University College Ibadan and then the University of Vermont; bagged Ph.D in mathematics education from the University of Chicago and consequently, the first Nigerian woman to be awarded a doctorate degree (Nwankwo, 2016).

In the political arena, women are not left out. For example, Prof Remi Sonaiya was the first Nigerian woman who sought to become the Nigerian president under the Kowa party in 2015. Furthermore, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti stands out tall on the political stage of Nigeria. Johnson-Odim and Mba (1997) noted that Funmilayo was a teacher, political campaigner, women’s rights activist, traditional aristocrat in Nigeria, and was also the first woman in Nigeria in to drive a car. In the words of Johnson-Odim et al, Ransome-Kuti’s political activism led to her being described as “the doyen of female rights in Nigeria” as well as “the Mother of Africa.” Still on politics, another nationally and internationally recognized political heavyweight and pioneer activist of women’s rights is Margaret Ekpo. Bello, (2016) notes that Ekpo was one the three women appointed to the House of Chiefs in the 1950s. Due to her distinguished contributions in Nigerian socio-economic and political development, the Calabar International Airport and a refectory at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, were named after her. There are hosts of other women who have made names as medical doctors, pharmacists, ministers, military and police officers, nurses, teachers, commissioners, vice-chancellors, magistrates, judges, justices and so on.

From the foregoing examples of women who have achieved both social and economic feats in Nigeria, it is clear that when women are not involved in the workforce because of poor educational background occasioned by gender inequality in education, only part of the able workforce is being utilized, and thus economic resources are wasted (Uzoma, Osuji & Anumudu, 2014). In the same vein, the United Nation believes that economic growth and social equality should go hand-in-hand, arguing that gender inequality in education holds back growth of individuals, development of countries and the evolution of societies to the disadvantage of men and women (United Nations, 2012). Gender inequality in education and its consequent discriminations against women remain a common occurrence in Nigerian society and this hinders economic growth of the country as women are wrongly described as wealth squanders or consumers of wealth. Nicholson (1990) succinctly said that the position of women in Nigerian culture was dependence oriented. Hence, a common address to women of Igbo extraction as “Oriaku”, the consumer of wealth. This frame of mind towards women is belittling. Similar conditions hold sway in Northern Nigeria where women and girls are not allowed to go to school on account of cultural and religious orientations. Under this condition, many women now live in abject poverty and have little or nothing to contribute to the economy because they were not given opportunity to go to school. Awoyemi (2004) notes that persistent gender inequality in education constrains a society’s productivity and ultimately slows down its economic growth and the economy pays for this in reduced productivity and diminished national output tomorrow.

More still gender inequality in education imposes limited knowledge of basic health issues for better nutrition and survival. It takes education to expose one to good health culture and neat sanitation. Illiterate mothers are more likely to be vulnerable to diseases and also more likely to perpetuate their ignorance to their progenies than the educated ones. Hence, illiteracy is a snare to family life and social development.

Closely connected with socioeconomic implications of gender inequality in education is high birth rate, high infant and maternal mortality rates, decrease in the quality of life among uneducated women due to lack of basic health knowledge necessary for making decisions relating to themselves and their children (Kabeer, 2005). Consequently, equal educational opportunities across genders are a necessary condition for socioeconomic development of Nigeria.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This paper concludes that education is a key factor in socioeconomic development of any nation. Despite the fact that education is a key factor in socioeconomic development of nations, there is a perceived gender inequality in education in Nigeria. This inequality cuts across all the socio-political zones in Nigeria, though in varying degrees. It places women at some levels of disadvantage in socioeconomic life in Nigeria. It also has some implications for socioeconomic development of Nigeria in general. To mention just but a few,

- It decreases human capital development.
- It leads to shortage of workforce.
- It leads to wastage of economic potentials of women.
- It impoverishes women and makes them economically dependent on men.
- It reduces economic growth of the country generally.

Against the above backdrops, it is hereby recommended that education being a key factor in socioeconomic development of every nation, the Federal Republic of Nigeria should criminalize illiteracy and inequality in education based on gender discrimination; proscribe early marriage for girls; declare state of emergency in education sector, and provide free education across all levels of education: primary, secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria.

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