



The Nexus between Gender and Educational Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of recorded history, men have always emphasized gender differences. The sexes differ visibly in some physical characteristics. In traditional society, work/role ascription was highly affected by physical, sex differences. Males did the hunting and fighting while the women did work which could be combined with baby-care-work which was receptive, interruptible and calling for no great physical strength. This had the effect of assigning most of the adventurous and exciting work to men and most of the drudgery to women. This paper seeks to examine the connection between Gender and educational development in the society at large, including Nigeria, x-raying specifically, how Gender inequality in the world affects the educational development of a society especially, Nigeria.

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Introduction

The Concept of Gender

Gender refers to the social, psychological, and cultural attributes of masculinity, and femininity that are based on the previous biological distinctions. Gender pertains to the socially learned patterns of behaviour, and the psychological or emotional expressions of attitudes that distinguish males from females. Ideas about masculinity and femininity are culturally derived and pattern the ways in which males and females are treated from birth onward. Gender is an important factor in shaping people's self-images and social identities. Sex is thought of as an ascribed status; a person is born either a male or female (although transsexuals such as Kate Bornstein, Caitlyn Jenner etc make us realize that sex can be changed).

Gender is learned through the socialization process and thus is an achieved status. In many circles, Kate Bornstein would be dismissed as a "freak of Nature" instead of someone who forces us to clarify exactly what we mean by gender. The dominant view in many societies is that gender identities are expressions of what is natural. People tend to assume that acting masculine or feminine is the result of an innate, biologically determined process rather than the result of socialization and social-learning experiences. To support the view that gender-role differences are innate, people have sought evidence from religion and the biological and social sciences. Whereas most religions tend to support the biological view, biology and the social sciences provide evidence that suggests that what is natural about sex roles expresses both innate and learned characteristics. It is very crucial to define some of the terms with relation to gender and educational development for more vivid understanding.

Gender

Cultural understanding of what constitutes masculinity and femininity in a society.

Gender Identity

Acknowledging one's sex and internalizing the norms,

values, and behaviours of the accompanying gender expectations.

Gender Roles

The social and cultural expectations associated with a person's sex.

Sex

Biological and physical differences between females and males.

Sexism

The ideology that one sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other.

Masculinity

Attributes considered appropriate for male.

Femininity

Attributes traditionally associated with appropriate behaviour for females.

Feminism

An ideology aimed at eliminating patriarchy in support of equality between the sexes.

Education

A process of training and instruction, especially of children and young people in schools and colleges, which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. Okoh (1998) sees education as a process of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another.

Development

A stage of growth or advancement.

The Concept of Education

The educational processes of the society reflect its nature and its needs, and as these change, so its educational processes may have to change. Thompson (1983:26) explains this process when he analyzed the functionality of education in traditional and modern societies. In simple small's scale, isolated and self-sufficient societies, where the security and survival of the group is considered, educational practice tends to stress the transfer to new members of the cultural symbols,

values, beliefs, and sanctions upon which personal relationships, patterns of conduct and customs were based.

Formerly education was seen as an instrument for promoting social stability and continuity. It increasingly became a tool for promoting and controlling changes, and transmitting new national values and skills. "Education is the key that unblocks the door to modernization" Harrison and Myer (1971). Emile Durkheim (1947) sees education as "an instrument through which society perpetuates itself". He believes that educational change is not only an important reflection of the underlying structural and cultural changes but also an agent in that process. Hence, from this perspective, it could be argued that no analysis of stability and change in any given society or community could be complete without a careful examination of its educational system.

Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know. Rather, it means teaching them to act, think and to behave as they were not accustomed to act, think or be have before. Also, it is worth noting that the aims of education are strongly related to the social, economic and political structure of a country (Uchendu, 1995). Based on these, it is not surprising to say that education is one of the essential factors that contributed and still contributes immensely to the changing economic role of women including Nigerian women. Education has improved their work skills and broadened their employment opportunities. It is an escape route from a life of drudgery as petty farmers in the rural areas to a better life in the cities. Nigeria's education has played the greatest role in changing the economic participation of the female gender. It has the greatest stimulating and motivating effect on them. All these benefits of educational development have influenced the special attention given to women education or "the girl child education".

The Federal Government of Nigeria (1981), in recognition of the importance of women participation in the economy, formulated the National Policy on Education which states as follows:

1. The inculcation of natural consciousness and national unity;
2. The inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society.
3. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and
4. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence, both mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is the term used by feminists and women's rights groups to ask for equal treatment with the men-folk in society. According to the Beijing platform for action "Gender equality" means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit. Equality is essential for human development and peace. Attaining gender equality demands a recognition that social, economic, cultural and political systems are gendered; that women's unequal status is further affected by race, ethnicity and disability and that it is necessary to incorporate women's specialty, priorities and values into all major social institutions.

A publication by the Canadian Women Bureau on the status of women in 1995 pointed out that gender equality advocates equal enjoyment by women and men of socially

valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. This they explained does not imply sameness but it is rather a demand that their opportunities and life chances are equal. It is However, necessary, to note that emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment does not presume a particular model of gender equality for all societies and cultures, but reflects a concern about men and women given equal opportunities to make choices about what gender equality means and work in partnership to achieve it. Equal treatment of women and men is insufficient as a strategy for power because of current disparities.

Theories of Gender Equality

The Biological Theory

This theory sees inequality between the sexes as well as the gendering of labour in society as biologically and generically determined. In what was tagged the human biogrammer, Tiger and Fox (1972) argued that sociologists who assure that human beings behave simply in terms of their culture have ignored the role of genetical differences as a determinant of human behaviour. They opine that human biogrammers determine the behaviours of the sexes (while men are aggressive, women are prepared for childbearing). Basing gender differences on biology rather than genetics is because labour gendering is based on biological characteristics. While pointing that there was a great deal of advantages in gendering labour, Tiger and Fox (1972) did not ascribe superiority to one gender over another.

The Cultural Theory of Gender Differentiation

This theory views gender as being culturally determined and the perceived inequality in society between the sexes are not outcomes of socially constructed power relationship. This theory sees human behaviour as largely determined by culture rather than biology or genetics. In her devaluation of women" Sherry et al (nd), posit that a higher value is usually placed on culture rather than nature in society. She argued that this is because society valued culture more than nature and since women were closer to nature they were naturally perceived and treated as inferior.

The Social Stratification Theory of Gender Differentiation

In her "the dialectics of sex" which was published in 1972, Shulamith Firestone contended that the gendering of labour and the sexual class system predates and is also more basic than the specialties of division of labour which differentiates all the members of society. This theory sees sex class as a function of biological reality unlike the economic class system, thus men and women are created separately and as well not equally privileged. She argued that because women bore children, they were dependent on men for their survival. This dependence on men produced unequal power relationships and power psychology, which formed the basis for all future stratification systems. She saw the conception of babies outside the women as one of the ways women can be freed from their reproductive role and therefore their inferiority to men.

Gender and Educational Development

Sustainable development is not possible without the production of equality between men and women. This equality according to UNICEF (2000) can make the difference between action and transformation. According to the World Bank research for UNICEF (2000), each additional year a woman's income increases by 10-20%, agricultural development increases by 10%, infant mortality drops by 10% and the returns on investment in deferred health expenses increases by 25%.

UNICEF (2000) posits that more education for girls means smaller healthier families. Women and girls who are empowered tend to have more control over their lives through investment in education. It also pointed out that educating females is the single highest yielding investment that a developing country can make. The World Bank in trying to point out the level of gender inequality and discrimination pointed out that one out of five, or 130 million children around the world ages 6-11 are not in school and 73 million of these are girls thus they estimate that 2 out of every 3 children not in school are female.

To demonstrate progress towards the elimination of gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005, more than 180 countries converged in Dakar Senegal in April 2000. Girls' education and basic education have been widely acknowledged to be effective approaches to sustainable development. It should be noted that reducing poverty and working for sustainable development requires partnerships between women and men in the pursuit of a more secure, equitable and prosperous world. Gender equity has been defined by the Canadian women rights groups as the process of being fair to women and men. It is necessary to ensure fairness by carrying out measures that will make up for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating at the level. Equity will ensure equality. There is the need for proper equity measures. Equality has to do with equal results. Institutions to ensure that both have equal opportunities often create initiatives that create opportunities for both women and men. But equality of opportunities does not always translate into equality of results, which represents a better measure of equal status.

Leadership training for women in governance structures is a measure of equality. This was the case when CIDA and the Social and Women Initiatives Fund of the Parliamentary Centre of Canada provided such support to women members of the National Assembly in Vietnam in 1966. They were trained on public speaking, presentation skills and campaign development and this helped the Vietnam Women Union to produce professional female politicians. Building the capacity of female politicians and parliamentarian helps more women to be elected and hold office. Back home in Africa, more women are elected into higher political offices, for example, late Professor Dora Akunyi, NAFDAC Director General in Nigeria; Liberian President Ellen Sallaf Johnson; Minister of Petroleum Mrs. Diezan Alison-Madueke; Aviation Minister, Mrs Stella Oduah; Minister of Finance Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Education Dr. ObyEzeKwesili; Deputy Governor of Rivers State Presently Dr, IpaliboBanigo, former Senator Florence ItaGiwa etc. This to a large extent brings women closer to achieving equality with men in government structures.

Conclusion

Men and women should see themselves as stakeholders in building a just society where the contributions of both males and females are valued equally in society. Gender equality

should not be seen as solely a women issue separate from men. Gender should not be seen as meaning women only. The approach tends to see men's characteristics as the norm and that of women different from the norm. It should be noted that both sexes are influenced by their gender, which shows an interrelationship on the ideas of the status of men and women. Change for women usually translates to change for men and vice versa. When maternal and reproductive healths are supported, women are provided with access to quality services and reproductive's education. This will in turn involve strengthening responsible fatherhood and increased access to information on health and health services for men and for adolescent boys and girls.

Inequality is more experienced by women; this is why advocates of women empowerment became more aware of the unfair power relations to sensitize women. This is not usually exactly the same for all women as the degree of inequality differs according to race, ethnics group, culture, class, age, disability and other status. Empowerment affords both sexes the opportunities of being in control in control of their lives as it ensures the gaining of skills, setting their own agenda and building self confidence and self reliance. This also ensures that women have better control of their lives by acquiring a voice to challenge and overcome the inequality they experience.

Issues of gender equality and empowerment can only be addressed by the individuals who can empower themselves through organizations and agencies. Feminist groups can play a role in supporting feminist and gender issues. The achievement of gender equality can only be effected by the African woman herself as she discards imitation for originality, dependence to independence and ignorance for knowledge. This will ensure that she realizes her full potentials and genuinely foster gender equality. It should be noted also that the biological differences between women and men does not imply the superiority of one sex over another.

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