

# IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER AND EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Evidence abounds to prove the fact that Nigerian education used to be gender biased and greatly in favour of males. Recent observations however show that women are beginning to compete favourably with men in almost all areas of life. The purpose of this study was to re-examine gender issues and educational opportunity in Nigeria. Survey research design was employed. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Final year students of FCE(T), Akoka constituted the population while 280 were randomly sampled. A 29-item questionnaire was adopted for the data collection. It was validated by two experts and its reliability also found to be as high as 0.793. It was administered by the researcher and some postgraduate students. The data collected was analyzed with  $F$  %,  $SD$ ,  $X$  and  $t$ -test. The result shows that there is a high patronage of formal education among women of today with equal educational opportunity to males and females. Also, females were found to opt mostly for Business related and Vocational courses. Based on the findings recommendations were made.*

## Introduction

Gender issue, women empowerment and development are topics that appear important to every woman, not only in Nigeria, but in the world at large. According to Sulaiman (2004), these concepts emanated from the problems which women meet in their daily lives, coupled with the issues of under-utilization of their potentialities. This prompted the United Nations to proclaim 1975 as an International Women's year and 1976 – 1985 was declared the decade for women to redress the existing imbalance in the legal status of women. Despite this, by 1995, women were yet to achieve equal participation with men in most aspects of life. Therefore, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China. The aftermath of the Beijing Conference in Nigeria was the 1997 International Women's Day held in Abuja. Its aim was to implement the outcome of the Beijing Conference in Nigeria.

Obasanjo (2004), an ex-president of Nigeria once stated that we live in a masculine dominated society. That is, a world where males still dominate the environment. This implies that girls and women in most parts of Nigeria grow up accepting roles and status that are judged by the society to be inferior to that of males (Leonard and Offang, 1989). Also, going by the Nigerian tradition, males have exercised a prominent role over females in all facets of human endeavour. So many factors serve as constraints to women's self-expression and realization of their full potential. One of this, according to Egunjobi (1998) is societal expectation. The society has its structure about what is masculine and what is feminine, and in particular, the expectation that a woman's first responsibility is to take care of the home, children and husband.

Education is perhaps the most important constraint against women's manifestation and realization of their full potentials. This is why it is often said that if you don't train them, don't blame them. For women to prove their worth and remove the limitation of tradition and

religion, education is a must. This is because in Nigeria and other developing countries, women, to a high extent, are still educationally disadvantaged. Historically, in Nigeria before 1945, women were openly exploited educationally. As women became more aware, things began to change. Women were traditionally trained by their mothers for acceptability into the society, marriage ability and motherhood. Meanwhile, the society no longer has a place for illiterates because even graduates find it difficult to be gainfully employed in Nigeria today.

Comparatively, there are far much less educated females than males in Nigeria. There are many women around now who received little or no formal education as children and it is to these people that adult education comes out to the rescue by providing alternative options. This difference is unconnected partly with the fact that the language and illustrations in the Holy Bible, Quran and most textbooks betray a gender bias. While males are mostly described to be brave and adventurous, females are described to be mild, delicate, gentle, timid and submissive (Adsua, 2006).

The fact that there is gender bias in our education can be proven by many factors. The finding of NHDR (1996) which reveals that about 62.5% of the male population is literate while only 39.5% of the female population is literate. This shows a wide gender gap in literacy rate in Nigeria. In line with this, it has been observed that countries that have raised the status of their women educationally, socially, politically and economically usually enjoy a high standard of living while countries where women remain largely uneducated and are confined to the home front have a low standard of living (UNESCO, 1988).

It is without doubt that girls and women have made steady progress in all areas of formal education in Nigeria since independence, yet female education still lags behind that of their male counterparts. This is further buttressed by the fact that fewer females offer important subjects and courses like Science, Mathematics and Engineering to mention a few. Therefore, their choice of career is still confined to areas like Teaching, Nursing, Catering and Secretarial Studies (Adesua, 2006). This reason can be confirmed based on the number of female scientists and engineers in the country. In most faculties of Engineering in Nigerian higher institutions, the fact remains that few females are observed to offer Engineering courses when compared to their male counterparts. There are many academic sessions where there is not a single female student offering Engineering and Technical courses. The implication of this is that we have very few female engineers, doctors, scientists, but many female teachers.

The following data by NHDR (2004) help to further buttress the fact that male youths are more educated than females.

**Table 1: Distribution of Enrolment in Basic Literacy in Nigeria.**

Year	Male		Female		Total	%
	F	%	F	%		Difference
2001	232,797	64.1	181,237	35.9	505,035	28.2
2002	386,240	68.4	223,440	36.6	609,680	31.8
2003	452,086	60.9	290,104	39.1	742,190	21.8
2004	469,870	58.9	327,395	41.1	797,265	17.8

**Source: NHDR (2006).**

The data in Table 1 shows that there is a wide gap between male and female enrolment in literacy in Nigeria. Its difference was as high as 31.8% in 2002 and the least was 17.8% in 2004.

**Table 2: Secondary School Enrolment in Some Nigerian States.**

S/N	State	Total	Female	% Females
1	Abia	170,981	82,485	48.24
2	Anambra	60,308	19,063	31.61
3	Imo	202,571	109,733	54.17
4	Jigawa	26,559	8,142	28.51
5	Adamawa	60,308	19,063	31.61
6	Kaduna	143,106	61,845	43.22
7	Ogun	203,007	96,875	47.72
8	Ondo	26,611	122,585	46.5
9	Oyo	310,152	161,108	51.95

*Source: Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos*

The analyzed data in Table two confirmed further that there is a major difference in the enrolment of male and females for secondary education which is in favour of males.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this study was to find out

- 1) the extent of equality of educational opportunity among Nigerian males and females.
- 2) the extent of patronage of formal educational by males and females;
- 3) the nature of courses being studied by males and females.

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

- Ho (1): There will be no significant difference in the males and females patronage of formal education in Nigeria today.
- (2): There will be no significant difference in the type of courses being studied by males and females.

### **Research Design**

Survey research design was adopted for the execution of this study. Survey questionnaire was used for data collection. The opinion of a representative sample of the population was sought.

### **Study Population**

The population of this study comprised the final year students of the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Lagos. The students are about 1000 in number and graduated in October of 2008/2009 academic session.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The college under this study consisted four schools, namely:-

- 1) School of Business Education;
- 2) School of Vocational Education;
- 3) School of Science Education; and,
- 4) School of Technical Education.

A representative sample of 70 students was selected from each of the schools to form a total sample size of 280. Disproportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted for the sample selection. Equal number of males and females were selected from the four schools.

## Instrument for Data Collection

Survey questionnaire was the only instrument used for data collection in this study. It was titled Gender Issues and Educational Equality Questionnaire. It consisted of 29 items divided into three sections. The first section consisted of five structured items that sought for bio-data information of the respondents such as sex, level, course of study and so on.

The second and third sections consisted of items that sought for information for testing the hypotheses formulated. They comprised opinion statements followed by a list of four optional responses. The respondents were instructed to select and put a tick on any of the responses that serves as their opinion. The responses include:

- Strongly Agree - SA
- Agree - A
- Disagree - D
- Strongly Disagree - SD

## Validation of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by Adedokun (2003) to compare the educational opportunity and equality among some Lagos residents. It was however given to two senior lecturers who are into Educational Research and Evaluation for validation. They helped to correct the contents and constructs. They modified some of the items. Their efforts helped to ensure that the questionnaire had high content and construct validities.

## Reliability of the Instrument

To estimate the degree of consistency of the instrument, it was trial-tested on 20 respondent students in the same college. The data collected was divided into two equal halves with the use of split-half method of estimating reliability. Product moment correlation statistic was used for the analysis. The result gave a high reliability (correlation) coefficient of 0.795. This indicated that the questionnaire was highly reliable.

## Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was taken to the college by the investigator and other colleagues who are also postgraduate students of the University of Lagos, Lagos. It was administered to the students after due consultation with the management of the college and the Deans of the four schools.

The data resulting from the questionnaire was analyzed statistically with:

- Frequency (F);
- Percentage (%);
- Standard Deviation (SD);
- Mean (X); and
- t-test.

**Table 3: T-test of Difference in the Means of Male and Female Patronage of Formal Education**

Gender	N	SD	X	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Female	140	3.51	1.05	278	1.19	1.96	H <sub>0</sub> Accepted
Males	140	3.34	1.33				

The t-test analysis in Table 3 shows the means of the opinion of male and female of formal education. The analysis gave a t-test calculated value of 1.19. Its corresponding critical value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 278 degrees of freedom. Since the

critical value is higher than the calculated value, the null hypothesis of no difference was accepted.

**Table 4: t-test of the Difference in the Means of Opinion of Male and Females Students about their Courses of Study**

Gender	N	SD	X	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Female	140	1.25	3.84	278	3.52	1.96	H <sub>0</sub> : Reject
Males	140	1.13	2.34				

The fourth table shows the means and standard deviation of opinion of male and female students about their courses of study. The analysis gave a calculated t-test value of 3.52 while the critical value is 1.96. The calculated value is higher than the critical value at 0.05 level of significance and 278 degrees of freedom, hence, the null hypothesis of no difference was rejected.

### **Discussion and Implication of the Findings**

The job of nation building is the responsibility and joint efforts of all and sundry, and women should see themselves as playing complementary roles in nation building rather than the women fighting for equality at all costs. This is to discourage the Western idea of women's liberation from being taken seriously. These days however, women are beginning to be seen in every sphere of life as a way of fulfilling their roles in nation building. Meanwhile, the fact remains that women are not allowed yet to grow into their full potentiality in nation building and that they can do far more if given the chance.

Education and conscientization remain the most celebrated and accessible tools and the most powerful techniques for conversion and optimal contribution to nation building by every citizen, male or female. Women can utilize educational opportunities to expand their horizon. Conscientization is the development of critical consciousness through a process of reflection and action. Freire (1970) a professor of philosophy who popularized conscientization defined it as the process in which man, not as recipient, but as knowing subject, achieves a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes his life and capacity to transform reality. It is a social process taking place among people as they unite in common reflection and action upon their world which can only occur through praxis. Women can utilize educational opportunities to expand their horizon. In line with this, the first finding of this study reveals that there is no significant difference in the means of the opinion of male and female students about their present equal opportunity and access to education. This is buttressed by the fact that in the higher institution used for this study, female students are far more than their male counterparts. A further proof of this is that there are so many vocational training centres instituted both by state, federal and local governments that are found to be dominated by females. The implication of this is that women are beginning to be conscious of their imposed low status and beginning to make efforts at breaking away the shackles through the instrumentality of education. It also implies that in the very near future, women will be able to occupy and attain any possible academic, political and social status and rank shoulder high with their male counterparts. The jinx of gender and inequality will soon be a forgotten issue as both gender and especially women are no longer uneducated, overworked than men, and a neglected and under-utilized minority. The idea, however, is that their zeal for continuous education should be sustained, considering the amount of efforts that they will eventually contribute into the development of the nation. The study also found out that women's patronage of formal education has increased significantly, their courses and subjects of study are mostly vocational and Business inclined. An observation of the population of study reveals that the schools of Business and Vocational

Education are highly populated with females. In fact, out of about 120 students in the school of Vocational Education, more than 70% of them are females. The same goes for the School of Business Education. This revelation is in line with the finding of Adesua (2006) in a related study where she found that fewer females offer important subjects like Science, Mathematics and Engineering to mention a few. This, according to her, explains why females' career is still confined to areas like Teaching, Nursing, Catering and Secretarial Studies. By implication, it also explains the scarcity and dire need for female engineers, doctors, mathematicians, and so on.

### **Conclusion**

The first purpose of this study was to establish the extent of equality of educational opportunities by Nigerian males and females. Based on the finding of this study, it can be concluded that Nigerians of today are open to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of gender. In fact the study confirmed that females are beginning to patronize formal education far more than their male counterparts. This is also supported by the fact that there are many vocational, part-time and sandwich programmes in many parts of our cities. Women patronize and opted for these opportunities to break the jinx of backwardness cast on them by society. More so, education is a major avenue for women and men alike to become important and contribute effectively and meaningfully to national development.

This study also sought to compare the nature of courses being pursued by both genders. It can be concluded based on the findings that Business and Vocational Courses are much more dominated by females while Science and Technical courses are dominated by males. This is possibly due to the fact that most subjects like Science, Technology, Technical Drawing, Fine Arts and Mathematics are mostly offered by males because they are believed to be difficult and are therefore masculine subjects. On the other hand, subjects like Home-Economics and Secretarial Studies are mostly offered by females and are therefore described as feminine.

### **Recommendations**

The following are recommended based on the findings, of this study:

- 1) Since education has been widely seen and embraced as an instrument of change, it should be implemented by all tiers of government on all its citizens and especially females. It should be made compulsory and with sanctions imposed on any parent contradicting the release of their wards for formal education to at least secondary school.
- 2) UNESCO (1988) has proved that countries that have raised the status of their women educationally usually enjoy a high standard of living. Women education should be liberalized such that all women who do not have opportunity of formal education should be incorporated into schools to be able to become literates and contribute to home and national development.

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