

Gender Inequality among Nigerian Students

Tabitha Markus VANDIMA

Department of Science Education, Adamawa State University, Mubi, Nigeria

Abstract: - Education is a centrepiece for progress in every aspect of human life. Education is therefore expected to be equally accessible for everyone, all those seeking education should have the ideal choice and women should participate in higher education. The purpose of this paper is therefore to assess the existence of gender inequality among students in Nigerian institutions. Measures such as public enlightenment campaigns, involving the communities in planning and monitoring of schools, plan for the location of schools, increase in the number of female teachers, more schools need to be built in giving some aids/incentives to the girls at most in primary school level will have to be considered to bridge the gap between male and female. It is considered a collective responsibility and effort of government, parents, community and stakeholders to ensure this. It is in view of the above; the paper discusses the concept of gender inequality, gender inequality Education, causes of gender discrimination, challenges of gender inequality in basic education, ways of checking gender discrimination in education and theories of gender inequality. The study finally proffers possible suggestions.

Keywords: Gender inequality, students, education, discrimination and enlightenment

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the door to every society's progress. Economic, social and political growth is crucial. Girls and children must go to college and get training so that society can go ahead. Rufa (2000) said that "Educating kids improves the opportunities to know them. In this connection, extending access to schooling in most emerging nations in the past four decades has been the main strategy objective." According to the UN Charter, one of the fundamental rights values of children is that each kid (male or woman) has the right to obtain fundamental education and equal opportunities to obtain higher education in function of his / her personal capabilities. The problem is expressed in Nigeria's fresh National Education Policy, where equivalent instructional opportunities are provided for national people.

What is most essential is that everyone should be taught, trained, and trained to enhance his natural standard of life. If this is achieved, both children and girls will be educated and the whole question of parity will be denied at school. Gender equality for education means that all kids of school age whether they are girls or boys have equivalent or almost equal inscription rates. The scenario is that both men and women have equal or equal access to education.

Education is a way for a country to equip its people with growth throughout. It is the centre of advancement in all elements of human existence, domestic development and growth. This is in line with the World Conference on

Education 1998, which aims to develop and advance higher education. Higher education is anticipated to be similarly available to all; the ideal decision should be emphasized for all people seeking higher education, and females should be involved in higher education (UNESCO 2003). Section(1) (4)(c) and(5)(c) of the National Education Policy (FRN, 2014) provides that all Nigerian kids, regardless of actual or assumed handicaps, should be given equal instructional possibilities, each according to its capacity, and that equal access for all Nigerian people, in main and secondary schools, to education should be given to them. In addition, a objective within the general domestic goals of Nigeria, amongst others, is to contribute to domestic growth through appropriate, high-level staff practice, as outlined in the National Policy on Education. In fact, all citizens' education, regardless of sex, must be achieved if this is a goal, since education offers the appropriate abilities for contributing to domestic growth. Education is necessary. As such, the achievement of the required college education goals can only be achieved if college education is rendered equally available to all, regardless of ethnicity, ethnicity, language or faith.

Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through its Section (18) of the Constitution of 1999, has ensured that the government is guiding its strategy to guarantee an equivalent and sufficient instructional chance at every level in order to guarantee the achievement of college education objectives. Section (42) (2) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's Constitution (FRN, 1999) on the right not to discrimination indicated that, simply because of the circumstances of his birth, no Nigerian citizen shall be subject to any disability or deprivation. Equality or equal opportunities for all people is a fundamental right of the person, who, like all other freedoms, is enforceable not only by law but also by a universal nature. The Universal Declaration of Human Right (1948) in Article 26 acknowledges this concept by stating that everybody has the right to education and the 2000 Millennium Declaration aimed at promoting equality between men and women and encouragement of sustainable development.

Research has shown, however, that Nigeria has a fair level of women's higher education in gender equity. For example, the total graduate registration in overtime from 1980 to 1999 in Nigeria showed a huge discrepancy between masculine and woman registrations, as stated by Anho and Onojetah (2007). Studies have revealed that the degree of equal university accessibility is very low in Nigeria in terms of both women's and other disadvantaged educational organizations such as nomads, migrant fishers and street children (Emunimu& Ayeni, 2003 in Nwajuba, 2011 and

Oyebade, 2008). JAMB complains of the decrease of the amount of women who were exam applicants from the 438, 703 in 2003 to 353, and 834 in 2004, according to Nwajiuba (2011). As Ahmed (2010) notes, there is still a broad gulf for men to inscribe and retain. In Nigeria, this implies sex inequality in college enrollment. Hence the need for this paper in accessing gender inequality among students in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPT OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender is the socially determined roles and relation between male and female human being. It refers to a social cultural stratification of male and female individuals. This stratification also follows societal norms and values consideration that define the role male and female should play in society. Gender inequality means uneven or difference in treatment, access to provision or possession of materials or other resources (political or educational, means and power). Gender inequality is therefore a situation of uneven distribution of income, lack of access to productive inputs, such as credit and education, lack of command over property or control over earned income as well as gender bias in labour market and social exclusion between men and women (Ijaiya & Balogun, 2004).

It also connotes a situation where women do not have the same rights and enlightenments as men to human, social, economic and cultural development and where women do not have equal voice in civil and political life (Evans, 2001). On the other hand, inequality is often referred to as lack of equality; being unequal in amount, size, value or rank; lack of evenness, regularity or uniformity; lack of due proportion or uneven distribution of resources (World Book, 2002). Gender inequality in access to education suggests the existence of unequal opportunities for male and female who are qualified to receive education.

Gender discrimination exists in most parts of the world today. It is a universally acknowledged truth that societies had always been inclined to discriminate against the female half of the human race. It begins as soon as a child is born. There is much happiness and celebrations when a male child is born because of the importance attached to sex. This is due to cultural beliefs in the society. Culture is the means by which humanity controls and regulates nature. The universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than men and therefore are inferior to men. Women produce children; women are mothers and wives. They do the cooking for men and subordinate to male authority. They are largely excluded from high status occupations and from position power.

Culture regulates our life at every time from the moment a child is born until he dies. There is constant pressure upon that child to follow certain types of behaviour that other men have created for us. The female child is given out in marriage at an early age. This is why Afe (1980) sees the diminished and relegated position of women as a result of

society's unpalatable attitude towards the development of the feminine personality. The effect of such an attitude is persistent imbalance in the development of sexes in the society. However, with the advent of formal education, which made former traditional and authoritarian society more liberal, there has begun seriously too in certain areas the development of the female personality.

Pearson and Anyanwu in Fareo (2017) hold the view that the quality of pupils' performance at school depends on the home background. They opined that there should be an intensified effort to make the home literate through Adult Education so that parents would be more inclined to stimulate the education of their male children as well as female. Bond in Obielumani (2010), quoting Lord James of Britain, said that "the effectiveness of Britain's educational system depends largely on its being supported by the parents and the community". The influence of the home (parents) and community greatly dictates the female education.

In all societies living close to the survival level, male infants are valued more highly than female infants. This is basically for economic and security reasons. If there is a local school to go to, boys will get first priority. Education, as it is generally believed, will enhance their earning power, best of all by getting them a wage-paying job in the city, they will be able to support the family more adequately and provide for the parents at old age. As perceived by many literate people living in more affluent circumstances, this treatment of girls is unfair and cruel. Nevertheless, it reflects the hard economic and cultural facts of life in poverty-stricken contexts. And this is bound to persist as long as extreme poverty continues to affect lives of millions of families in the developing world.

Two female academic, among others, commented on the plight of women as victims of educational imbalance in the society. Mrs. Abimbola A Omololu, in her paper to the five-day (September 8th- 12th, 1969) National Curriculum Conference, commented on the existing inequality in the education of our boys and girls. She said that "women in Nigeria were and are still not held in high regard". Any amount of money could be spent in educating the male but money spent on the female who will later end up in the kitchen is regarded as a waste. Another contributor to the National Curriculum Conference - Malama, H.I. Kaita - lamented the continued denial to exercise voting rights by women. She concluded that the emancipation of women in the North requires that they be educated on the same place as their male counterpart.

While the investment of the male is non-hesitant, that of the female who is regarded as a second fiddle is given second thought. Permitting females' access to education serves as an important indicator to social progress. Abba (2004) noted that there are strong research indicators supporting the claim that investing in the education of females is the "single most cost-effective investment to improve standards of living in developing countries", especially the

poorest countries. The general obstacles to educational development include wide-spread poverty, lack of qualified personnel, gender, and apartheid against women, rapid population growth and foreign debt repayment bodies. It is argued that in Nigeria, women could hardly boast of any economic power without men with the bulk of women's work remaining unnoticed. With the multiplier effects of educating women, they can also control their fertility. Buttressing this, Colloughin Abba (2004) indicated that the interactive effect of schools in various aspects of social policies reinforce the economic case of investing in female education.

III. GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

According to Taiwo and Akin-Ainain Gambari (2004), gender refers to the social differences between men and women that are learned, changeable over time and have wide variations within and between cultures. It is a socio-economic variable used to analyze roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of men and women in any context. Inequality amounts to state of being unequal, example in status, rights and privileges. It connotes some discriminatory practices with respect to rights, privileges and status accorded to persons.

Gender inequality in education refers to the disparities in access to education between males and females. In Nigerian context, it refers to the fact that females have disproportionately low levels of access to all subsectors of educational system vis-a-vis their male counterparts. In other words, more men enroll and graduate from the nation's primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Hence, although women constitute about 50% of Nigerian population, their levels of participation in the educational programme of the nation is not proportionate to their size in the total population (Gambari, 2004). This goes to show that women population is not giving as much support commensurate to their number as they are ought to give towards the enhancement of educational sector of the country.

Equality has to do with distribution; the fairness or impartiality with which a given entity has been distributed. According to Alumode (2010) equity in education means the provision of equal opportunities for those who are qualified to receive education without regard to differences in sex, religion, social standing and environment. This implies that all section of the society should have their fair share of access to whatever educational opportunities for self-advancement through education been distributed evenly among the strata of members of the society irrespective of circumstances of birth, ethnicity, origin, religious beliefs or social status (Tonwe, 2005). Equity in university education according to Mohammed as cited in Ene (2007) referred to the removal of obstacles to university education opportunities which are not due to natural capacities and social arrangements but which are products of social factors such as socio-economic variations. He noted that discrimination on religious grounds and gender, indigene/non-indigene dichotomy, exorbitant

school fees, poverty, uneven distribution of educational resources and others could impair equity in university education.

IV. CAUSES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Adams and Bjork in Ekeh (2004) opined that one of the most persistent obstacles to an adequate development role of female education in many countries is the tendency for cultural beliefs to stand in the way of extending education to women. To the best of the knowledge of these two writers, the belief is widespread that the woman's place is in the home and formal education of unlikely to aid in fulfilling these basic needs. In fact, it is often feared that education of women will weaken the family, rearrange the hierarchy in the family and village. Thus, the above view was supported by reference to Ashley Montagu's description of the almost non-literate people to view women as inherently inferior to men.

Utah in Ekeh (2004) in his opinion, says a lot of wrong had been done by religious organisations in the early days of their coming to Nigeria. The Missionaries believed that the women needed training for environmental sanitation, care of the home, clearing surroundings and child-rearing. To them, all these were enough and the country should accept them as a way of life.

Education has a much more direct and powerful bearing on the social position of women according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Hence, equal educational opportunities are the greater importance in raising their status. Nevertheless, even when equal access to education exists, there is a great difference of opportunity between sexes. In countries where illiteracy is still widespread, it is more common in women than men. In India for example, the literacy rate is nearly 34% among women.

Chinua Achebe in Anikweze (2010) in his article stated that when children are of school age, the picture that emerges is the familiar preference to send boys rather than girls to school. This is particularly noticeable where the economic resources to train all the children in a given family is not available; the female child is made to understand that primary six education might in fact be too high an expectation for her.

Amazigoin Anikweze (2010) identified that attitude of society and consequently the influence of parents and their attitudes to the education of their female offspring from her childhood as being very responsible for low rate of female education. There is also the fear of some parents that while away from home, their daughters may lose their virginity, get pregnant, which in some cultures reduces their prospects for marriage.

There is a consensus of opinion among researchers that the critical mass of educated females that need to serve as role models to produce and nurture the kind of self-actualised women that will up-turn the career and labour market in the 21st century are presently not on the ground. Government lack

of commitment to female education is a minus to bridging this inequality and gap. The problem of female access to education has been blamed also on externalised policies from some international agencies. Lumumba (2000) observed that despite their nominal political independence, “most African countries have designed their domestic policies under the guidance or influence of external powers”. Thus, while gender equity has been a source of domestic debate and production of policy documents, the economic reforms of SAPs have negatively influenced domestic policies to social programmes like education and health that affect disproportionately women.

V. CHALLENGES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION

Some practices in the Nigerian society leave no one in doubt about the prevalence of discriminatory treatments meted to persons on the basis of gender. Some evidence abounds to buttress this point are:

- i. Economically, men are regarded as the bread-winners of the family, while women (suppose are the bread eaters). In the light of this expression, most men exercise more economic power and are accorded higher economic status than the women. Men engage in different types of labour with varying degrees of sophistication, and thus are more abundantly remunerated unlike most of their female counterparts who engage in menial jobs with little economic value. For instance, a preview of the executive officers and cleaners/messengers in most places of work shows that whereas men dominate the former, women dominate the latter. Most work done by women are either poorly remunerated or are generally unpaid for. Such work includes household chores, reproductive work, agricultural work and a host of others.
- ii. In the social sense, men and women do not attract equal social status. In Nigerian society, a male child is priced higher than the girl-child. Most polygamous families or cases of large family size are usually attributable to the efforts by couples to beget some male issues in the face of earlier female children. Evidences have shown that most cases of family instability or divorce have their roots traceable to absence of male issues in the family.
- iii. In the religious circle, gender inequality also manifests itself. In some denominations, the women do not ascend to some echelons of the religious hierarchy.
- iv. At the education sector, until recently, the education of the female child was seen as an anathema. This new was noted on the conception that it is unwise to train somebody who would one day be given out in marriage to another man. It was indeed perceived as an economic waste to the parental family to educate a female child. In those days, Basic Education was the sole right of the male child while the females had

their places reserved in the kitchen. A similar trend is still in place in the northern states of Nigeria based on religious reasons.

- v. Another dimension to this discriminatory practice in the field of Basic education is with respect to the courses offered by male and female students. There is this retrogressive speculation that mathematics and sciences courses are for males while females are better in the literary arts and home economics. At the instructional level, particularly in secondary schools, the teachers attitude sometimes tend to suggest that males must be good in sciences, while females could perform poorly in sciences without an alarm.
- vi. In the field of government appointments and executive positions, women have not been getting their fair share. According to the Nigerian Report of the World Fourth
- vii. Conference on Women in Ahmed (2015) "out of over forty Directors General (DGs) in the Nigerian Civil Service, only about six of them were women by 1990"

The scenario is the same at various levels of government. At the tertiary institutions, the very few females who had scaled through the hurdles of securing some executive posts had given very good account of themselves as people who could compare favorably with their male counterparts or even excel.

VI. WAYS OF CHECKING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

For the problem of gender discrimination to be completely curtailed:

- i. The government and the public must do everything within their powers to increase the number of girls in all schools.
- ii. The content of primary and secondary grammar school education must be reviewed so that girls are not made to specialise at every early stages as housewives. This is a scientific age and there must be more opportunities for girls to learn science in secondary schools.
- iii. Efforts should be made to bridge the gap between educational opportunities for women and men. This can only be achieved now by spending more money on women's education by way of extra scholarship in secondary institutions and increased grants-in-aid, particularly for science teaching in girls' secondary schools.
- iv. Incentives must be given to women by way of employment and promotion opportunities to encourage them to learn and take up interesting and challenging careers which will give them the security and the income they need for their general upkeep.
- v. Legislation should be enacted or promulgated in favour of female education.

- vi. Parents, especially the literate ones, should be enlightened on why it is necessary to educate their female children. Lectures should be held to make people aware of the implications of gender discrimination.
- vii. Formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women must be vigorously pursued by governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Finally, all ideologies or practices that see the woman as some sort of accessory of men, a servile maid to do man's dirty jobs should be discarded and stopped. Organisations like Forum for Women in Politics and the Beijing Conference should create awareness in the females that they are essential tools for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change.

VII. THEORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

This study would be looking at two (2) theories that would be required for explanation of gender discrimination which can be related to the Nigerian society, especially as it affects education and labour market participation. These theories are as follows:

1. Biological Determinism
2. Dual Systems Theories

Theory of Biological Determinism

The biological determinist position holds that biology is destiny and that human nature and society are dictated. There is an essential unchanging difference between the masculine and the feminine. However, the essential argument of the biological determinist position is that there are fundamental physical and psychological differences between males and females in society and this brings about male supremacy and patriarchy inevitably. The Hard view uses the biological differences between sexes to justify male supremacy in society. There is also a soft version/view of biological determinist which admits that biological differences between sexes can cause the differential role allocation and thus the subordination of women in society.

Another biological determinist is based on Evolutionary theory. Even Spencer in Arisi (2002) started off believing in the doctrine of equal rights He was arguing against women's rights, using Darwinian and Malthusian principles as the cornerstone. Spencer asserted that evolution has fitted sexes to their different social functions hence the existing sex roles are biologically prescribed. Sociobiologists supported the view that behavior is always governed by genetic self-interest and that each sex tries to maximize the chance of the survival of their genes by promoting their welfare and those that share their genes. Trivers in Arisi (2002) maintains that although the two sexes cooperate in the joint task of reproduction, relationship between them are

essentially hostile and mutually exploitative. Another claim of socio-biology is that aggression and male dominance are the effects of biologically-given sex differences. To him (Trivers), human behavior is based on certain genetically based predisposition called human bio-grammar. Males are to dominate, women are biologically programmed to reproduce and bring up children.

In conclusion, the socio-biologist emphasize that the differences in male and female characteristics are due to male and female hormones resulting from genetic inheritance and genetic adaptation.

Dual Systems Theories

As a response to failings in other theories, dual-systems theories have evolved, which attempt to articulate and explain the subordination and exploitation of women in the labor market. According to Hartmann in Gambari (2004), the position of women in labour force is the product not just of capitalist social relationships, as Marxist theory argues, but of capitalist and patriarchal relationships, which accommodate each other.

Walbyin Ekeh (2004) argued that patriarchy and capitalism are analytically independent; patriarchy is not reducible to capitalism. As Abbott and Wallace in Ekeh (2004) argue, the advantage of this position is that it recognizes the role that both men and capitalism play in the subordination and exploitation of women. It offers an explanation for women's participation in the labour market, and, in Walby's writing, points to the conflict between patriarchy and capital, and to the ways in which women are dominated and exploited in both the public and private spheres.

VIII. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the access and equity dimension of gender in education in Nigeria. The paper examined the concepts of gender inequality, access to and equity in university education. It also touched on the rationale to ensure gender equitable access to university education, trends in male and female enrolment in university education and factors that give rise to gender inequality in equitable access to university education in Nigeria. Some policies and measure to enhance gender equitable access to university education in Nigeria were discussed. It is hoped that the discussion that the paper provided would lead to equitable access of male and female to university education in Nigeria.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the existing disparity among the school children in the primary and post primary schools, it is a fact that no society can develop by educating only the male or female members of the society. Serious consideration should be given to policies designed to remedy existing inequalities in school participation rate. Since access to education is

fundamental to the survival of any society, there is need to improve mechanisms to meet basic education needs to allow more and more children their right to education.

As pointed out by Rufa'I (2000), the following strategies are recommended:

- Public enlightenment campaign on the need for female education not only in the primary schools but in the secondary schools and beyond through radio, television and newspapers etc.
- Sensitize the communities on the benefits of educating girls and women.
- Urge the communities to plan, manage and monitor basic education programmes.
- The number of male teachers has out-numbered that of the females. There is need to increase number of female teachers to attract more girls in the schools.
- Initiate some incentives for girls in schools at least in primary secondary school levels.
- Plan the location of schools to give equal opportunity to all school age children especially girls.
- The government should build more schools for girls in order to improve the number of those admitted into the schools.
- The idea of girls not continuing with their education should be discouraged to allow them study up to and beyond the secondary schools.
- Women are to come together to form a body that will monitor and coordinate the issue of girls' education.
- Parents should not only encourage their girl -child to read and be well educated but also sensitize them to doing professional courses that should place on the same pedestal with their male counterparts.

These strategies could only be achieved through the government's political will and the cooperation of the parents and other members of the society.

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