

Original Research Article

Gender Imperatives in the Nigerian Educational Sector

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Abstract

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Promoting gender equality and women empowerment is the third United Nations Millennium Goal which aims at eliminating gender disparity. An increase in women's educational human capital assures more effective use of the nation's productive work force thereby enhancing economic growth. Higher investment in women's educational human capital is therefore a sound economic policy. This study revealed that gender inequalities exist in the access to education at primary, secondary as well as tertiary level. Also, all the disciplines enrolled for in Nigerian Universities during 2010/2011 academic session were dominated by male-gender with an exception of only Arts in which 50.2% of the total enrolment were female candidates. Government should therefore be more proactive in correcting the existing gender disparity in education so as to make real progress towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal of education for all by 2015 realizable.

Keywords: Development, Economy, Education, Gender, Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development will only be achieved when men and women are given equal opportunities to actively participate in all spheres of the socio-economic and political life of the country. Participation of both genders is essential not only for the purpose of eliminating social inequalities but to contribute to economic growth of the country. Available evidence-based researches support the assertion that equitable participation of men and women in the social, economic and political life of the country will lead to increased economic growth of their communities and improve the welfare of their families (Adebayo, 1997; Barrientos *et al.*, 2004; Ejembi *et al.* 2008; Balogun, 2008; Angya, 2008; Mohammed and Abdulquadri, 2011).

Gender analysis has often been misunderstood as being about the promotion of women only, but gender analysis focuses on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour and needs. It also determines household security, well-being of the family planning, agricultural production and many other aspects of rural life. Gender analysis examines how the roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women interact and how that affects outcomes. Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

Also, across and within countries, gender disparities in education, mortality rates, health and other social and economic indicators are greatest within poorer income groups. According to Olusi (2009) in most developing countries like Nigeria, women's contributions to the economy are rarely acknowledged because of gender inequality; and this failure perpetuates and reinforces barriers to their equal rights to access economic goods and services. Olusi (2009) stated further that gender inequalities impose large costs on the well-being and health of the poor, diminishing productivity and the potential to reduce poverty and ensure economic growth.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the roles of gender in the Nigerian educational sector.

METHODOLOGY

The data used for this study consist mainly of secondary data obtained from National Bureau of Statistic, British Council of Nigeria and other relevant sources.

Table 1. Total Enrolments in Primary School by Year and Gender

Year	Total	Girl	%	Boys	%
2001	19,041,223	8,457,812	44.42	10,583,411	55.58
2002	19,806,083	8,791,072	44.39	11,015,011	55.61
2003	25,704,793	11,338,280	44.11	14,366,513	55.89
2004	21,395,510	9,571,016	44.73	11,824,494	55.27
2005	22,115,432	9,926,359	44.88	12,189,073	55.12
2006	23,017,129	10,441,435	45.36	12,575,694	54.64
Average	21,455,602	13,422,659	44.65	12,092,366	55.35

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010.

Table 2. Primary School Completion Rate by Year and Gender

Year	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
2001	82.82	83.50
2002	70.08	84.48
2003	75.12	83.76
2004	67.66	82.44
2005	70.21	84.95
Average	73.18	85.83

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010.

Data were analyzed using Frequency Distribution tables, Percentages and means.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Total Enrolment in Primary Schools by Year and Gender

Table 1 showed that in 2004, the enrolments of girls were 9,571,016 which represent only 44.73% of the total primary school enrolments in the same year; while 55.27% (i.e. 11,824,494) were boys enrolled within the same period.

Though there was a slight increase in the primary school enrolments for girls in 2006 (10,441,435), the gap still persisted when compared to the enrolments for boys (12,575,689) during the same period. The trend was the same for the following years of 2007 and 2008. This clearly showed the level of disparity in the access to basic education on the basis of gender.

According to Ojobo (2008) some men who do not believe in the education of women, including their female children and wives, hold the view that the place of the woman is in the kitchen. Such men prefer to marry illiterates as wives for fear that the educated woman is too assertive, domineering, forward, and in general a threat to the male-dominated society. This has compounded women's desire for quality education thus limiting their participation when it comes to educational development.

Primary School Completion Rate by Year and Gender

Table 2 revealed that the average primary school completion rate for girls was 73.18% while for the boys; it was 85.83%. For instance, in 2005; the primary school completion rates for girls and boys were 70.21% and 84.95% respectively. Also, the rates of primary school completion for boys increased from 83.50% in 2001 to 84.95% in 2005 while the rates decreased from 82.82% in 2001 to 70.21% in 2005 for girls. This indicates that more boys completed the primary school education than their female counterparts. And this may not be unconnected with low incentives towards educating girl-child. Ojobo (2008) noted that despite of all the laudable goals and objectives of educational sector, Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development. Investing in educating women and girls now will increase productivity in this generation and will promote sustainable growth, peace and better health for the next generation. The importance for development of girls' education cannot be overstated.

Total Enrolment in Secondary Schools by Year and Gender

In table 3, it is revealed that in spite of the gradual increase in the secondary school enrolment in Nigeria, there was still a considerable gap between the enrolment of male students and their female counterparts. An increase was recorded in the total enrolment in second-

Table 3. Total Enrolment in Secondary Schools by Gender

Year	Total	Girls	% Girls	% Boys
2004	6,279,462	2,739,754	43.63	56.37
2005	6,397,343	2,854,718	44.62	55.38
2006	6,536,038	2,893,167	44.26	55.74
2007	6,068,160	2,608,014	42.98	57.02
2008	6,625,943	2,943,802	44.43	55.57

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2010

Table 4. Admission into Nigeria Universities by Gender (2000 - 2008)

Year	Gender	Applications by Gender	Admissions by Gender
2000	Male	238,456	26,665
	Female	177,835	19,101
2001	Male	743,725	54,972
	Female	312,892	35,797
2002	Male	580,338	31,942
	Female	414,042	19,903
2003	Male	603,179	59,742
	Female	443,771	45,415
2004	Male	486,539	69,715
	Female	355,339	52,777
2005	Males	526,281	45,256
	Female	390,090	31,728
2006	Male	456,953	52,413
	Female	346,519	36,111
2007	Male	911,653	64,706
	Female	390,876	42,624
2008	Male	598,667	67,427
	Female	455,393	45,673

Source: JAMB Annual Report, 2010.

dary schools from 6,279,462 in 2004 to 6,625,943 in 2008 though there was a drop in the year 2007. The enrolment of girls witnessed similar increment with 2,739,754 and 2,943,802 in 2004 and 2008 respectively. However, the enrolment of boys within the same period was quite higher; showing that gender inequality exists between the rate of enrolments of the male students and their female counterparts in secondary schools and also indicates the significant role gender plays in education.

According to Okojie (2002) discrimination in female access to education means that women will continue to have less education than men and be confined to low income jobs, thereby perpetuating female poverty. Therefore an important strategy for reducing female poverty is greater educational human capital investment in women. This will increase their access to higher-paying and higher status jobs, thereby reducing household as well as female poverty. Furthermore, an increase in women's educational human capital assures more effective use of half of the nation's productive work force thereby enhancing economic growth. Higher investment in women's educational human capital is therefore a sound economic policy.

Admission into Nigerian Universities by Gender

Table 4 showed that out of the total admissions into the Nigerian universities in 2000, 19,101 (which represent 42 %) were females while 26,665 (i.e 58 %) were males. Although there was an increase in the recorded admissions of female students from 19,101 in the year 2000 to 45,673 in 2008; yet there is a wide gap when compared to the number of male students admitted within the same periods. The enrolments of male students rose from 26,665 in 2000 to 67,427 in 2008.

Also, in terms of the number of applications for admission into Nigerian universities during these periods; the trend still showed inequalities between the two genders. For instance, the applications for admission by male candidates in 2000 were 238,456, while only 177,835 female candidates applied for admission into the universities in the same year. And out of 455,393 female candidates who applied for admissions in 2008, only 45,673 (i.e 10.03%) were able to secure admissions into the various universities in the country.

This implies that women continue to have less access to higher education thereby limiting their contribution to the economic development of the nation. A lot of factors

Table 5. Distribution of Student Enrolment in Nigerian University by Disciplines (Undergraduates) 2010/2011

Disciplines	Male	%	Female	%
Administration	57,433	57.9	41,799	42.1
Agriculture	30,360	60.4	19,938	39.6
Arts	36,254	49.8	36,601	50.2
Dentistry	849	59.0	590	41.0
Education	62,852	52.4	56,998	47.6
Engineering	71,584	86.8	10,916	13.2
Environmental Sciences	20,055	73.3	7,308	26.7
Law	25,124	63.0	14,755	37.0
Medicine	27,964	54.8	23,047	45.2
Pharmacy	4,389	54.2	3,707	45.8
Sciences	124,496	61.4	78,130	38.6
Social Sciences	70,212	66.5	35,294	33.5
Veterinary Medicine	1,911	71.2	772	28.8

Source: National University Commission, 2013.

have contributed to gender disparity in education in Nigeria which includes the socio-cultural traditions in the community, financial status, and religious belief.

Distribution of Student Enrolment in Nigerian University by Disciplines (2010/2011)

Table 5 showed the student enrolments into Nigerian universities in the 2010/2011 academic session. There were more male students than female students in all the listed disciplines with the exception of the Arts discipline in which female students admitted surpassed the males' though the difference was so small when compared to other cases in which the male students outnumbered the female students in enrolments. For instance, 124,496 male students were admitted for Sciences in 2010/2011 as against 78,130 female students in the same Science discipline. Despite the emphasis on improving female students' enrolment in schools, there is still a wide disparity in traditionally male dominated disciplines such as Engineering (71,584 males; 10,916 females) and Environmental Sciences (20,055 males; 7,308 females). The implication of this is that gender remains a strong determinant of access to formal education in favour of males in Nigeria. Hence, government must intensify efforts to encourage more female students' enrolment into Nigerian university. According to Okojie (2002) a positive correlation exists between the enrolment of girls in schools and the gross national product and increase of life expectancy. And because of this correlation, enrolment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in any society.

Literacy is a basic tool for upward social mobility and an improved standard of living (Ojobo, 2008). Educational qualifications are keys to improving one's standard of living. In terms of empowerment, a literate person has

greater access to sources of knowledge, and is better able to participate in decision-making in the family, community and wider society.

For individual and national development, it is crucial that girls and female adults should acquire formal education. Unfortunately, a cursory look at the pattern of women's involvement in education in Nigeria reveals abysmal low levels.

As observed by Ojobo (2008) educational imbalance between men and women in Nigeria is due to societal traditions and myths which relegate women's education to the background vis-à-vis men. Considering all the efforts made by the various levels of government-Federal, State and Local, together with non-governmental organizations and donor agencies, there are still more to be done in the area of girls and women education.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to reveal the gains to Nigerian economy when the issue of gender is properly addressed. Socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the calibre of women and their education in that country. Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills. To empower the women in Nigeria, enhanced educational opportunities are considered expedient. This is especially important now because the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women, offer an invaluable opportunity to reinvigorate efforts to achieve positive development. There is therefore a clear need to build capacity and commitment to Gender equity if Nigeria is to fully implement the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) and

achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as globally envisaged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are therefore suggested for effective policy formulation in addressing gender disparity challenges in the educational sector of Nigerian economy.

- i. Government should be more proactive in correcting the existing gender disparity in education so as to make real progress towards the attainment of the MDGs' goal of education for all by 2015 realizable.
- ii. An empowering educational approach which incorporate women as invaluable partners for social development should be encouraged

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