

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Women Education in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

**Dr. Patience Nemezu Chioma**

Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Political Science and Public Administration,  
Babcock University, Ilishan Remo Ogun State, Nigeria

**Ogbonna Enyichukwu Goodluck**

Postgraduate Student, Department of Education,  
Babcock University Ilishan Remo Ogun State, Nigeria

**Jonathan Chinaka Nwosu**

Professor, Department of Education,  
Babcock University Ilishan Remo Ogun State, Nigeria

### **Abstract:**

*The goal of education is to equip, enlighten and develop both men and women with relevant skills, norms, values, and knowledge. In spite of various educational strides and declaration targeted towards ensuring equity at various levels of education there has been constant inequality mostly in the representation of women in the Nigerian education system. Some of the major factors identified to have hindered gender parity in Nigeria education are culture and parental preference among others. This implies that the fundamental human rights of some individuals are being denied hence, limited towards national building and development. However, recent statistics on various levels of education in Nigeria show a great level of improvement in the enrollment of women in education. In view of this acknowledgment, this paper gives an overview of the trends of women education in Nigeria, highlighting its challenges and prospects for equal and sustainable educational attainment. It recommends among others the need for enlightenment of both genders towards ensuring gender parity in education, enacting new policies that emphasize the inclusion of females in education through quota system, formation of formidable support group towards women empowerment especially towards education.*

**Keywords:** Gender parity, parental preference, women education, development

### **1. Introduction**

The disparity in opportunity between genders is rarely perceived as an issue. The generalization of sexes seems to be deeply embedded thus leading to underestimating the aspects of social differences between men and women. Gender disparity in educational opportunities is not seen as an issue and consequently received less attention thus, placing women under many educational disadvantages (Meighan, 1981). This was affirmed by Tahir, et al, (2017) who posited that all through the world, females are the victims of education disparities. Conversely, this reflects the monopoly enjoyed by their male counterpart.

It is common among different cultural groups for males to receive education before females and for the latter to catch up just as schooling becomes universal for males (Tahir, et al, 2017). Hence, common and considerable disparities of enrolment at the post-primary level (Blackemore and Cooksey, 1981).

One of the fundamental ways both developed and developing nations can work together with their citizens in achieving long term development goals and improving the economic and social standard of living is by investing into education. In analyzing various research studies, Herz and Sperling, (2004) in Subrahmanian (2007) affirmed that high levels of education and development are positively correlated. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) defined education as a means of gaining functional literacy and numeracy, knowledge and skills for a future productive endeavor. Similarly, O'Donnell G. (1997) sees education as the process of developing individual potentials in order to contribute meaningfully to their environment. However, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004), defined education as the process that enables an individual develop holistically i.e., morally, mentally, physically, politically, technologically and socially towards self-reliance and in turn, adapt and function effectively in any environment.

African countries including Nigeria have made significant progress in overcoming the gender gap at various educational levels. A greater level of commitment has been made by most African states at the international and regional levels in dealing with the gender gap in education since the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985 and the International Women's year of 1975 (Osokoya, 2008). Nigeria and other African states are signatories to various international and regional treaties which commit states to either legally or morally prohibited discrimination as well call for concrete actions that will deal with the gap in gender imbalance. Some of these declarations includes; the Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien 1990), Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls (Ouagadougou 1993), the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy (Montreal, 1993), the E-9 Summit (Delhi, 1993), World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), Fourth World Conference on

Women/Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing, 1995), African Conference on the Empowerment of Women through Functional Literacy and the Education of Girl Child (Kampala 1996), World Conference on Higher Education (Paris 1998), OAU Conference of African Ministers of Education (Harare 1999) and Education for All (EFA) Forum (Dakar 2000).

Some notable decisions taken in the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) gave rise to some of the following decisions:

- Promote the goal of equal access to basic education at all levels through effective measures of eliminating discrimination based on language, race, gender, age disability, national origin, or any other form of discrimination.
- To a greater level reduce the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level.
- By the year 2000, give universal access to basic education and ensure completion of primary education by at least 80 percent of primary school-age children; ensuring that the gender gap in primary and secondary school education is closed by the year 2005; ensure Universal Primary Education in the country before the year 2015.

In recent time there had been different clamor in some parts of the world concerning the status accorded women.

Studies reveal that equal opportunities in life are not given to women unlike their men partners. Furthermore, this disparity is also reflected in areas of education and socio-economic development. Hence, the development and welfare of women have become an area of great worry to many which result into formation of policies and programme focused on women. This is based on the realization that one's sex should not create inequality between women and men.

Despite the translation of various declarations into constitutional commitments, the impact of these declarations on gender imbalance in the education system, Nigeria is still faced with challenges on women education. Thus, women education or gender equality in access to education is one of the contemporary issues that have occupied a key place in the global policy discourse. It is imperative that necessary attention be given to Women Education because it is an investment and a gateway to knowledge and development both for the individual and the society.

## **2. Gender Disparities and Access to Education**

The term 'gender' can be said to mean a social distribution of individuals as either male or female. One indispensable feature of this concept is the role and responsibility attached to each social category. In Nigeria, females seem to have fewer chances than males. It is worthy to note that Nigeria being the most populous nation in Africa and ranked the 7th in the world was estimated to be have a population of 199 million individuals in contrast to about 193 million in 2016 (NPopC in NBS, 2019), representing 50.8% men and 49.2% of female. Women education touches on a fundamental issue of gender disparity which is both ancient and global. Plato contends that women ought to share as far as possible, in education and in other ways with men (Aminu and Osinulu, 1994). Furthermore, Plato contends that 'women ought to share, as far as possible, in education and in other ways with men. He posited that when equal access is not given to both men and women, the state, instead of being a whole is reduced to half. In the view of Indabawa (2004) in Indabawa (2006), the term 'gender' does not simply mean men or women. He further noted that issues of disparity often arise in Nigeria in an attempt of defining gender roles and responsibility. Also, exclusion is one other problem associated with this.

## **3. Role of Culture in Women Education in Nigeria**

Nigeria traditionally has a patriarchal structure characterized by gender inequality between male and females which was in practice before colonization. Patriarchy is a system that differentiates individuals on the basis of sex and providing an advantage to males. Sharing this viewpoint, it is a set of social relations which are material based which enables women to be dominated by their male counterpart (Okojie, 2001). Osokoya (2008) argue that it the male and female that conditions the spatial segregation thus, while the male space consists of the public domain, the female space largely deals on the household and its immediate environment. Therefore, in a patriarchal structure, the activities of women are largely limited to the household. This can be attributed to the reason why it is expected of women from some ethnic groups to marry early and cater for their families as being a wife does not necessarily require formal education. Furthermore, this patriarchal attitude made most parents to have less preference for the education of women unlike their male counterpart. The male children, seen as heir of the family is encouraged to pursue education in order to earn good income that will help them shoulder the responsibility of the family. Therefore, investment into women education is seen as unnecessary and alluded that beneficiary of such investment is the husbands' family.

Parental preference for male education gave rise to low academic expectation for women education. Illiteracy among parents contributed majorly to this factor as most parents had high expectation for male children with the believe that male children are more academically sound when compared to the female counterpart.

The subjugation and exploitation of women is a reality of global culture, evidenced in the powerful and powerless (in need of empowerment like the poor and oppressed classes) nexus replete in human societies. Men have and wield considerably more power than their female counterparts. Although the biological or genetic explanations have not been deemed sufficient reasons for the power differentials between males as a group and females, industrialization, modernization, Christianity and Islamization short religion, have all been employed successfully to explain a great deal of the variance in the power relations of the sexes (Aminu and Osinulu, 1994).

## **4. Governments' Interventions into Women Education in Nigeria**

Various boards/committees were set up by government between 1950 and 1970 to investigate into the educational issues of their region. As a result of which education gained much attention and growth. This could be seen in the free universal and compulsory education UPE Scheme introduced in 1955 in the Western Region. Included in this scheme is the mandatory and free primary education for both girls and boys of school age, the development of training

facilities for teacher, extensive teacher training programmes and secondary schools, as well as the introduction of secondary/modern and secondary/technical schools. However, this resulted to a tremendous increase in school enrollment five years after the introduction of the UPE scheme, as there was surge in student enrollment of 1,100,000 children which represented 90% of school aged children (Aminu&Osinulu 1994). Furthermore, commissions and committees were created based on the success of UPE scheme in the Western Region to assess various aspects of educational provision and structure preceding and after the Nigerian independence. Consequently, based on the outcome of the assessment of different committees, a three-year non-fee-paying primary education system which operated until 1966 was introduced by the Federal Government.

Between the period of 1950 and 1970 strong attempts were witnessed by Nigerian leaders to increase the number of primary and secondary education to many adults and children. Although, there was explode of educational opportunities for children, underrepresentation of girls in school was still witnessed owing to the fact that the percentage of girls in school as a proportion of the total female population was lower in contrast to the number of boys enrolled in school.

Another notable contribution of Government between 1960-1970 was the 1969 National Curriculum Conference which gave rise to the publication of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1977. Consequent educational policy actions have been based on this document. However, there was a failed attempt by the NPE of 1977 to capture the need of women's education notwithstanding the fact that the UN decade of 1975 was in operation between 1975 to 1985. Hence, it will be obvious that the government was unaware that the circumstances surrounding women education needed a more detailed policy commitment and action by the government. Indeed, it was not until the latter half of the 80s that the Nigerian government acted in acknowledgement of the notable gender disparity in educational opportunity and distribution.

The Federal Ministry of Education attempting to ameliorate the prevailing educational disparity and based on the need to address the disadvantaged opportunities of women presented the proposal on female education at the emergency meeting of the National Council of Education (NCE) held in Kaduna in February, 1986 (Aminu&Osinulu 1994; Shamaki& Daniel 2015). The following policy objectives were endorsed by the council:

- a. Creating awareness on the existence of equal educational opportunities, provision, and assess to all regardless of status, age, gender, locality;
- b. Ensuring that females are given more educational opportunities from primary to tertiary levels;
- c. Notwithstanding the age, re-orientate females on their attitude towards education;
- d. Awakening of the cognizance of all women to require for the development of a positive mental self-image;
- e. Ensure the provision of basic literacy and skill acquisition programmes for illiterate females and early School leavers through:
  - Skills such as cooking, sewing, baking, knitting, typing, crocheting, tie/die, tatting, and subsistence agriculture;
  - Educating parents, guardians, and other individuals in order to achieve a change in attitude towards women educational programmes so developed (FME, 1986).

## 5. Enrollment Statistics in Nigerian Schools

Based on the statistical data published by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2019, there is significant increase on female enrollment when compared to the data made available by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2009. Based on this data, an evaluation of women education in Nigeria's Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary education is presented in the table below:

Year	Primary School			
	F	M	%M	%F
2014	12,545,408	13,255,789	51.4	48.6
2015	12,049,225	13,393,310	52.6	47.4
2016	12,155,241	13,435,940	52.5	47.5

Table 1: Primary School Enrollment 2014 - 2016

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: FME, 2019

Year	Junior Secondary school			
	F	M	%F	%M
2014	2,891,624	3,311,470	46.6	53.4
2015	2,920,182	3,260,109	47.2	52.8
2016	2,786,332	3,181,810	46.7	53.3

Table 2: Junior Secondary School Enrollment 2014 - 2016

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: FME, 2019

Year	Senior Secondary			
	F	M	%M	%F
2014	1,971,306	2,321,183	54.1	45.9
2015	2,281,418	2,629,526	53.5	46.5
2016	2,058,117	2,417,192	54.0	46.0

Table 3: Secondary School Enrolment 2014-2016

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Fme, 2019

Type of Institution	2014/2015				2015/2016				2016/2017			
	F	M	%F	Total	F	M	%F	Total	F	M	%F	Total
Federal	58,588	64,225	47.7	122,813	54,018	57,759	48.3	111,777	47,828	55,879	46.1	103,707
State	77,534	96,342	44.6	173,876	67,536	77,742	46.5	145,278	48,518	56,436	46.2	104,954
Private	8,864	8,710	50.4	17,574	2,896	2,969	49.4	5,865	3,170	2,458	56.3	5,628
Total	144,986	169,277	46.1	314,263	124,450	138,470	47.3	262,920	99,516	114,773	46.4	214,289

Table 4: Summary of Student Enrolment in Nigerian Colleges of Education 2014-2016

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: FME, 2019

Type of Certificate	Enrolment				Out-Turn			
	F	M	Total	%F	F	M	Total	%F
National Diploma	2,400	918	3,318	72.33	1,589	743	2,332	68.14
Higher National Diploma	1,427	636	2,063	69.17	755	338	1,093	69.08

Table 5: Enrolment and Out-Turn by Certificate in Colleges of Health Sciences 2014/2015 Academic Session

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: FME, 2019

Academic Sessions	Enrolment			Out-Turn		
	M	F	%F	M	F	%F
2013/2014	175,745	117,638	40.10	74,362	50,304	40.35
2014/2015	174,105	119,687	40.74	65,228	43,060	39.76

Table 6: Polytechnics Enrolment and Out-Turn 2013 -2014

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Federal Ministry of Education 2019

From the tables presented above, it can be observed that there is a gradual increase in the enrolment of women in Nigeria education. Female enrolment has experienced a steady increase at various levels in the country (Akubulo&Omeje, 2012). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the literacy rate among young men and women between the ages of 15-24 is 70.9 and 59.3 respectively.

Table 1 reveals that the enrolment of females into primary education in 2014 was 48.6%. However, there was a decrease in the enrolment strength in 2015 and a slight increase in 2016 as enrolment percentage was 47.4% and 47.5% respectively. Conversely, the enrolment of male in 2014, 2015, and 2016 was 51.4%, 52.6% and 52.5%.

At the Secondary school level, between the periods of 2014 to 2016, enrollment of females into junior secondary school was on the average of 47% and 53% for males in the period under reference. Table 3 reveals that enrolment was below the average of 50% between 2014 and 2016. Thus, in 2014, 2015, and 2016, the percentage of girls in secondary school was 45.9%, 46.5% and 46.0% respectively. Comparatively, over 54% of boys were enrolled in 2014 to 2016 at the senior secondary school level.

Female enrolment into Nigerian tertiary education was below average in 2014, 2015, 2016 as it represents 46.1%, 47.3%, and 46.4%. In Colleges of Education, female enrolment was 46.1, 47.3% and 46.4% in 2014, 2015, and 2016. Table 5 shows that enrolment of females in the Colleges of Health Sciences 2014/2015 academic session accounted for 72.33% and an out-turn of 68.14% at the National Diploma level. While at the Higher National Diploma (HND) 69.17 were enrolled and had out-turned 68.14%. Table 6 shows that female enrolment in polytechnics between 2013 and 2014 was 40.10% and 40.74%. The out-turn of students stood at 40% for the two periods. Furthermore, female enrolment into Nigerian universities in 2017 was 43.1% while the enrolment of their male counterpart was 56.9%.

Based on the data sourced from the Nigeria Education indicator, Federal Ministry of Education in NBS (2019), the completion rate for girls in primary, junior, and senior secondary in 2016 was 64.8%, 38.9% and 28.7% respectively. While for boys, the completion rate in primary, junior, and senior secondary was at 70.8%, 43.3%, and 33.2% respectively.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

It is no doubt that education is a vital force for development. When women are undereducated, they are robbed of the opportunity of self-reliance, thus unable to contribute fully to national development. No developed country can afford the huge human life devaluation and economic loss which is consequent of under-development of education for any significant proportion of her populace.

Therefore, there is need for government to redress the imbalance of women in education thus ensuring gender parity. This can be achieved by establishing women education centers and lowering the entry requirement of girls into schools. Non-governmental organizations in partnership with the government should engage in a massive media campaign against gender imbalance. There is need for traditions to accommodate western education. Finally, it is important for women to live up to present challenges by utilizing various avenues available to them for learning.

## 7. References

- i. Ackerly B. A (2001). *Feminist Theory: Liberal*. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences.
- ii. Akinkugbe O.O. (1994) *Nigeria and Education: The Challenges Ahead*. Ibadan: Intec Printers Limited
- iii. Akubuilu F. and Omeje M. (2012). *Women Education in Nigeria: Predicaments and Hopes*. Online. Retrieved from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Women-Education-in-Nigeria%3A-Predicaments-and-Hopes-AkubuiluOmeje/9680b658ae7f35c63d67cbe03a8db7b710eab62d# citing-papers>
- iv. Blakemore K. & Cooksey B. A. (1981). *Sociology of Education for Africa*. London: George Allen & Unwin
- v. Herz and Sperling, (2004). *What works in girls' education – evidence and policies from the developing world*. Council on foreign relations.
- vi. Indabawa, S. A. (2004). *On some socio-cultural determinants of girls' involvement in education in Nigeria*. The African Symposium, 4(1), 4-9. Retrieved May 20, 2009, from <http://www.ncsu.edu/aern/TAS4.1/TAS4.1.pdf>
- vii. Indabawa S.A. (2006). *Educational access for girls: the case of Kano State of Nigeria*. In: ODUARAN A., BHOLA H.S. (eds) *Widening Access to Education as Social Justice*. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4324-4\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4324-4_23)
- viii. Meighan, R. (1981). *A sociology of education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited
- ix. Okojie, C. 2001. *Female Under-schooling in Africa as assessed by the African Academy of Science Research Programme*. Female Under-Schooling in Africa as Assessed by the African Academy of Sciences. Paper presented at the International Colloquium on Gender, Population and Development in Africa. Abidjan 2001.
- x. Osokoya I. O. (2008) *Contemporary Issues in Educational History and Policy in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Laurel Educational Publishers Ltd
- xi. NBS (2019). *Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria*.
- xii. *National Policy on Education* (2004). Lagos: Federal Government of Nigeria Press
- xiii. *National Policy on Education* (2013). Lagos: Federal Government of Nigeria Press
- xiv. Shamaki E. B. & Daniel S.G (2015). *Women Empowerment through Education in Some Selected Local Government Areas in Taraba State, Nigeria*. International Journal of Innovative Development & Policy Studies 3(3):37-43
- xv. Subrahmanian, R. (2000) *Co-producing Universal Primary Education in a Context of Social Exclusion*. Households, Community Organizations and State Administration in a District of Karnataka, India. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Open University, UK.
- xvi. Subrahmanian, R. (2005) *Gender Equality in Education: Definitions and Measurements*. International Journal of Educational Development, 25(4): pp. 395-407.