PUBLIC ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION COMPONENT OF THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME IN ANAMBRA STATE, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract
The importance of education as a strategy of women empowerment cannot be over emphasized. This is because when women are educated, they contribute meaningfully to national development. Sequel to this fact, the key objective of this field research was to ascertain how members of the public assessed the inclusion and performance of education component in women empowerment programme in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria. Anchored on functionalist platform, 185 adults were randomly selected as respondents. It was observed that education which performs the function of: transmitting culture, promoting social and political integration as well as maintaining social control and serving as agent of change was accommodated as a major tool of women empowerment in Anambra state. However, it was also found out that adult education aspect for women is not receiving adequate attention yet. The study recommended that the state government should make girl child education free and compulsory as well as proactively address issues of adult education for older women in the state.
Keywords: Education, Empowerment, Public assessment, Women empowerment

Introduction

The 'empowerment of women' defined as a process by which unequal power relations are transformed, helping women to gain greater equality with men, has been recognized at various meetings (international, regional and national conferences) as a basic human right. It is also considered as an imperative for national development, population stabilization and global well-being. Similarly, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, 2000) contended that global health depends on fostering the full capacity of all citizens. Essential to this is the empowerment of women

Women empowerment operates at both individual and government levels. At the individual level, it includes processes by which women gain inner power to express and defend their rights

and gain greater self- esteem and control over their own lives and social relationships. At the government level, this includes the extension of all fundamental social, economic and political rights to women.

There are several approaches to women empowerment. These include but not limited to three strategies (a-c) mentioned below:

(a) Male participation and acceptance of changing roles of women in society. This model according Okonkwo (2007) is very essential for women's empowerment.

(b) On their part, UNFPA, (2000), had observed that reproductive and sexual health rights are critical for the empowerment of women. Such rights enable women to secure social, economic, political and cultural participation which are crucial for improvements in their quality of life and to attain their full capacity as citizens. Essential to this is the empowerment of women

(c) A major approach to empowerment of women is through education. This is the major focus of the current study. Undoubtedly, education has become a vast and complex social institution throughout the world. It prepares citizens for the various roles demanded by other social institutions, such as the family, government and the economy.

The 23rd Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 'Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the 21st century' focused on the importance of education and argued that it is both the entry point into the global economy and the best defense against its pit falls. It follows that once women are educated and integrated into the workforce, they would have more choice and be able to provide better social services, healthcare and education for their children.

The relevance of education to women empowerment and other aspects of socio-economic development of nation states can best be appreciated from the key functions of education in any society which are briefly discussed inter alia to include:

(a) Education performs a rather conservative function – that is the transmission of the dominant culture. Schooling exposes each generation of young people to the existing beliefs, norms and values of their culture. In Nigeria, every school child is exposed to citizenship education and also teaches them the current socio-political affairs.

(b) Promotion of social and political integration: Education serves the latent function of promoting social and political integration by transforming a population composed of diverse racial, ethnic and religious groups into a society whose members share to some extent a common identity (Touraine 1974). In Nigeria, for instance members of each of the political parties come from different ethnic groups. From a functionalist perspective, the common identity and social integration fostered by education contribute to societal stability and consensus (Woodard, 1998).

(c) Maintenance of Social Control: Like other social institutions, such as the family and religion, education prepares young people to lead productive and orderly lives obeying norms; values and sanctions of the larger society. In every society, school children learn respect for social control and reverence for established institutions, such as religion, the family and the state.

(c) Serving as an agent of change: Education stimulates desired social change. For instance, the introduction of sex education to the school curriculum has reduced the soaring pregnancy rate among teenagers (Williams 1992).

(d) Bestowal of Status: Education contributes to this process by sorting people into appropriate levels and courses of study that will prepare them for appropriate positions within the labour

force.

Types of Education

In the context of this paper, education constitutes of four key types, namely, formal education, informal education, skill acquisition and access to information. Unfortunately, the level of exposure of the female gender to these forms of education as a deliberate strategy of empowerment remained unsatisfactory prior to Nigeria's first democratic experience in 1979 as illustrated in Tables 1 and 2 below .

Table 1: *Primary School Enrolment in Nigeria by Sex 1959 -1970*

Year	Primary School Enrolment			% of females
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	
1959	92,480	23,106	115,580	19.99
1965	51,807	60,072	111,879	53.7
1970	205,959	104,095	310,054	33.7
Total	**350,246**	**187273**	**537,513**	**100**

Source: Alele-Williams (1988)

Table 1 above shows that girls formed only about 19.99% of the primary school population in Nigeria in 1959.

Table 2: *Secondary School Enrolment in Nigeria by Sex 1975-1980*

Year	Secondary School Enrolment			% of females
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	
1975	580,889	200,736	781,625	25.7
1980	Above 1,000000	543,564	Above 1,543,564	35.2
Total	**1,580,889**	**744,300**	**2,325,189**	**100**

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, (1985)

Table 2 shows that female enrolment into secondary schools in Nigeria was as low as 3.45% in the 1975 school year. The situation as evident in Tables 1 and 2 negatively affected the position and accomplishments of women in different spheres of endeavors at that period. Indeed, women empowerment recorded minimal success at that time in Nigeria, and is yet to attain optimum results even with democratic dispensation now in place in the Nigerian nation country.

Objectives of the Study

i. To ascertain whether members of the public accept that 'access to education by women' constitutes a component or strategy of women empowerment programme in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria

ii. To ascertain the nature of the assessment of members of the public about the performance of education component of women empowerment programme in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria

iii. To find out the education is perceived to be inadequately provided/accessed by women for their empowerment in Anambra state

Brief Review of Literature on Treatments, Problems or Challenges Encountered by Women in Education and Employment in Nigeria

According to Flexner (1972) the educational system in many societies has long been characterized by discriminatory treatment of women. This is because there is this believes that women should aspire to become responsible wives and mothers rather than lawyers and intellectuals. This was also the case in Nigeria some decades ago. The Educational system in Nigeria until recently was characterized by several discriminatory policies against women which include:

a. Cultural Barriers: Initially, women were not considered good for schools. They were expected to aspire to be wives, mothers, good cooks and home-keepers but never to dream of becoming teachers, lawyers, doctors etc. A woman's place was culturally perceived to be in the kitchen; hence women were traditionally given limited opportunities in male dominated African social systems. Mathias (2008) affirms that the basic training given to the girl child is the one that will enable her to be a good wife and mother.

b. Differential Educational and Status gain opportunities set at birth for male and female children: When a male child is born, the parents and society at large are happy, but when a girl is born especially if there are other females before her, the environment is usually charged with disappointment. Educating such girl child was considered a waste of money, time, effort, and resources as they were conceived to eventually end up in another man's house or kitchen, unlike the males. Thus, while parents consider boys as suitable for western education, traditional forms of education were employed to prepare girls for future roles as mothers and wives. For few girls who got opportunity to go to school, most often their education was terminated at the primary level. Only very few girls proceeded to secondary school,

c. In some early education schools, female students washed men's clothing, and cared for their rooms and served their meals.

d. Also, sexism in education manifested in many ways like, textbooks have negative contents or stereotypes of women; guidance counselors' pressure on female students to prepare for 'women's work'. There are also cases of unequal funding women and men's educational and recreational programme.

e. Low employment of women into academic positions – teachers, professors, administrators etc. According to Tyler (1995) educational discrimination was evident in the employment of teachers. The position of university lecturers and administrators which hold relatively high status were generally filled by men. While other jobs with lower salaries were left for women.

f. Discriminating Policies: Women face several challenges despite their educational attainment. According to Komolafe (2006) banks in Nigeria employ single women as opposed to married women and also require that the single ladies employed must not be pregnant for a certain period. She also noted that in many establishments' practices of sexual harassment and pregnancy have been reported especially in banking, aviation and advertising industries. She went further to state that such policies have forced women who should have been in the formal sector into the informal sector, thereby disempowering them. The implication of this policy is that working women are not expected to get pregnant and single women often delay marriage and pregnancy until their thirties and forties. Even at that they may still have to get permission from their management to raise a family. Also the married women may resort to telling lies about their family status, which gives rise to the disturbing trend of leaving their children at the mercy of house-helps, who in most cases are children themselves (Agbu 2006).

g. Discrimination in employment and wage: There is wage gap between men and women in Nigeria's highly segregated labour market. Few women are employed in the formal economy due to social discrimination in education and training as well as gender-based division of labour. Moreover, Nigeria's minimum wage Act excluded many workers, in particular those groups where women are disproportionately represented such as part-time workers and seasonal agricultural workers (Afro News 10 May 2005)

h. Religious Barriers: Both Christianity and the Moslem religions in Nigeria enjoin women as sacred order, to be under the men. Women were perceived as weaker sex that must be protected by men. Thus, women are not supposed to be seen frequently in public or heard; they are supposed to be hidden at the background. They are not supposed to take any decision outside the one taken by their father, brother or husband which must be obeyed. This barrier has hindered many women from pursuing their desired career.

Reflections on Educational Processes for Empowering Women that could be Applicable to the Nigerian State

The educational processes or tools for empowering women include the followings:

(i) Formal Education: Education like the family and religion is a cultural universal. This implies that every society has mechanisms for educating her population. Education also constitutes an important aspect of socialization – that is the life long process of learning the attitudes, values and behavior considered appropriate to members of a particular culture. Formal education occurs in institutions that had been accepted by the society as an agent that transmits knowledge, skills and morals (Mathias, 2011). The relevance of formal education as a tool for empowerment of the girl child in Anambra state, Southeast Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This is because educating a man translates to educating an individual, whereas when a girl is educated, the entire society benefits.

(ii) Informal Education: When people think of school, they often think of brick houses and the teachers, administrators and other employers who staff school buildings. However, homes can also be described as classrooms where parents providing guidance play the role of teachers (Garison 2001). In every society, conventional schools build on the foundation laid at home. The first place of socialization is the home where the child learns the norms, values and beliefs

of his society. The acquisition of skills can also be actualized within the school (like in schools that teach technical or professional skills) or in environment outside the school building. Informal education can occur both in the classroom and at home, through interaction with parents, teachers, friends and even strangers. Exposure to books, films, television and other forms of communication also promotes socialization. When learning is explicit and formalized, some people consciously teach, while others adopt the role of learner. The process of socialization is called informal education (Schaefer 2006).

(iii) Access to Information: Information is ideas, attitude or emotions from one person or group which is usually transmitted to another primarily through symbols (Hogan 2006). Accessibility to information enables one to accumulate knowledge and also makes possible the existence of empathic understanding among individuals.

Theoretical Orientation

To the functionalist, education has both manifest (open stated) and latent (hidden) functions. The most basic manifest function of education is the transmission of knowledge. Schools teach students how to read, speak and write. It also bestows status on individuals (Charter and Sherman 1996). In addition to these manifest functions schools perform a number of latent functions: transmitting culture, promoting social and political integration, maintaining social control and serving as agent of change.

Methods

Quantitative and qualitative survey was conducted in parts of Anambra state, Southeast Nigeria in December 2017 to ascertain public assessment on the extent of use of education as a tool for pursuit of women empowerment. Structured questionnaire designed to reflect the various

arguments was administered on a sample size of 185 consenting participants aged 18 years and above (drawn from one randomly selected senatorial zone out of the three senatorial zones of the state). The survey was conducted at market places, schools, along the streets, villages, communities, hospitals and other public places. Also, two respondents were purposively selected for key informant interview (KII) in consideration of the position they occupy in the state relevant to girl-child education and the women empowerment project.

Research Findings

The findings of the research are thematically presented below in line with specific objectives:

Objective 1: To ascertain whether members of the public accept that 'access to education by women' constitutes a component or strategy of women empowerment programme in

Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by their views on whether education is deliberately included as a strategy of women empowerment programme in Anambra state

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Yes	154	83.3
No	30	16.2
Don't know	-	-
No response	1	.0.54
Total	**185**	**100.0**

Table 3 shows that 83.2% of the respondents affirmed the inclusion of education as a deliberate strategy of women empowerment in Anambra atate. Only 30 respondents representing about 16.2% had contrary opinion. The awareness and public enlightenment programme on girl-child education must have contributed to the high positive response.

Objective 2: To ascertain the nature of the assessment of members of the public about the performance of education component of women empowerment programme in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria

Out of the 185 respondents, 61.1% constituting the majority were of the opinion that education strategy has not been adequately exploited for women empowerment in Anambra state. Only 72 respondents, representing 38.9% of study participants were of the opinion that educational approach to women empowerment in the state has been adequately exploited. Further analysis based on social demographic parameters revealed interesting results as shown on Table 4 below. For instance, based on gender, 58 (59.8%) of the females and55 (62.5%) of the males were of the view that adoption of education strategy for women empowerment has not been successful and well implemented in Anambra state. However, 40.2% of the females and 37.5% of the males were of contrary opinion.

Table 4: Public Assessment of Education Component of Women Empowerment Programme in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria in Relation to Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Parameter or Variable	Education Component is adequately addressed (%)	Education Component is inadequately addressed or implemented (%)	Total
1.Sex	Male	33 (37.5%)	55 (62.5%)	88 (47.6%)
	Female	39 (40.2%	58 (59.8%)	97 (52.4%)
	Total	72 (38.9%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100%)
2. Age	18-27	45	90	135(73%)
	28-37	20	18	38 (20.5%)
	38-47	6	2	8 (4.3%)
	Above 47	1	3	4 (2.2%)
	Total	72 (38.9%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100%)
3.Religious Affiliation	Christianity	52	90	142 (76,8%
	Islam	14	16	30 (16.2%)
	Traditionalist	6	7	13 (7%)
	Total	50 (38.9%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100)
4.Marital status	Married	32	10	42 (22.7%)
	Divorced	-	1	1(.5%)

	Separated	1	5	6 (3.2%)
	Single	39	90	129 (69.7%
	Widow(er)	-	7	7 (3.8%)
	Total	72 (38.9%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100%)
5. Educational Attainment	Degree & above	38	57	95 (51.4%)
	Primary& Sec	34	51	85 (45.9%)
	Non literate	-	5	5 (2.7%)
	Total	72 (38.9%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100%)
6. Occupation	Students	-	4	4 (2.2%)
	Civil servants	30	12	42 (22.7%)
	Business/trader	20	34	54 (29.2%)
	Artisans	17	30	47 (25.4%)
	Farmer	-	23	23 (12.4%)
	Unemployed	4	7	11 (5.9%)
	Clergy	1	3	4 (2.2%)
	Total	72 (38.1%)	113 (61.1%)	185 (100%)

Objective 3: To find out if any aspects of education is perceived to be inadequately attended to as part of women empowerment programme in Anambra state**.**

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by their view on specific areas of education that is inadequately attended to as part of women empowerment programme in Anambra state

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Free education project for girls	30	16.21
Special scholarship scheme for girls	3	1.62
Adult education programme for women	152	82.16
Special education needs for women with forms of physical challenge	-	-.
Total	**185**	**100.0**

Table 5 above shows that majority of the respondents (82.16%) were of the view that adult education programme for women is inadequately attended to in Anambra state. The observation is particularly true because adult education centres that specifically respond to educational needs of women are non existent in the state.

Discussion of Findings

Changing Roles of Women in Education and Employment

In the contemporary Nigerian society, the situation has changed particularly in the southern parts of Nigeria where the number of women continuing in their schooling beyond primary and secondary schools has continued to be in the increase. According to Tyler (1995) pressure from feminist movement played a major role in opening the doors of educational institutions to women. The role of women in education could be said to be on the rise now. Examples of such rise include:-

(a)   Women dominate the primary and secondary schools as teachers, principals and headmistresses especially in southern parts of Nigeria.

(b)   There has been astronomical increase in female enrolment in all categories of schools in Nigeria that gradually, the worry is shifting towards low male enrolment especially in Anambra State.

(c)   Women have escaped the confines of their kitchen and are dutifully serving our society as lawyers, doctors, bankers, sociologists etc.

(d)   But in recent times women have made great strides in different endevours of life. Women who have been empowered through education have done excellently well in the positions they occupied. At the international level, Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria of England were not seen as women but as symbol of government, Margaret Thatcher led Britain for ten years as Prime Minister and distinguished Britain in international circles as a great nation. India which is the largest democracy in the world had a woman Prime Minister – Indirah Ghandi and during her years of service to the country, India did not suffer much socio-economic and political setback. And recently Liberia which had been in conflict had peace under the leadership of Ellen Johnson- a

woman (Mathias 2008). These women were able to showcase their talents because they have been empowered by education.

(e) In Nigeria, women who had the opportunity to hold both national and international offices of responsibilities have distinguished themselves on such positions. Some of them are Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Oweala – Managing Director World Bank, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili – Vice President World Bank of African Region, Professor Dora Nkem Akunyili – Former Director General of NAFDAC and Minister of information and communication, Professor Grace Alele – Williams – former Vice Chancellor of University of Benin. Others are Professor Roseline Omotosho, Professor Jadesola Akaude, and Chief Cecilia Ibru –Nigeria First Lady of the Banking Industry among others. All these women were able to rise to these positions because they were educated which helped them to make tremendous impact on the socio-economic life of the nation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that most government policies as well as companies have not helped the working woman to achieve her dreams. They have also forced most women who want to retain their jobs to remain single which may in future have a demographic effect on the country. Women should be encouraged in all spheres of life both at work place and at home. This is because; the woman folk carry dual responsibilities and will be able to carry out her duties/ responsibilities if she is given an enabling environment.

Finally, the gains from educating the girl child cannot be overemphasized. Women are the bedrocks of development in any nation. If a woman is properly empowered, she will not only develop the nation but she will develop the generation unborn.

Recommendations

The paper put forth the following recommendations:

1. Federal and state governments should make girl child education free and compulsory.

2. There is need to end all forms of violence against women which often affect their education and empowerment. The fourth world conference in Beijing recognized this when it stressed that violence against women should be seen as an illegal act in all country. A good example is the Cross River state law No. 2 of 2000 which prohibit Girl-child marriage and female circumcision. What this law implies is that it is an offence now in Cross River state to perform female genital mutilation, give out a girl child in marriage or impregnate a girl child. Where found guilty, the person (accused) goes to jail for one year or in the alternative pays a fine of N10, 000 for the first offence. For subsequent offences, the penalty is three years imprisonment or N20, 000. Many other states in the country are taking the same step (CIRDOOC P.E.P.S. No. 30) These penalties are not so serious, but they have put a check on the wrongful attitude of most parents and men who take undue advantage of teenage girls.

3. Parents should be encouraged to send the girl child to school, especially in those states where there is a strong cultural believe that the girl child is only supposed to be socialized into womanhood and motherhood. Sending the girl child to school will reduce the gap between the males and females and lead to proper empowerment which will ultimately bring out the hidden qualities of womanhood.

4. Any tradition or culture which will hinder women from manifesting their potentials should be abolished. This is because; women are the greatest resort to national development.

5. All policies that are discriminatory to women should be constitutionally lifted and sanction placed on any organization that still hold on such policy.

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