

The Power of Women Education: A Panacea for Progress and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Akinjide Isaac Yusuf

Department of Arts & Social Science Education

Lead City University, PMB 1, Ibadan, Oyo State

**e-mail of author - yakinjideisaac@gmail.com*

+2348034122812

Abstract

Women education is seldom perceived in political agenda to play a crucial role in the attainment of sustainable development goals. Although women make up a large percentage of Nigeria's population and educating them is as good as educating the whole nation, not much attention has been given to the importance and power of women education. This study was therefore carried out to address the power of women education in bringing about progress and sustainable development in the nation. A mixed study involving quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. A population of women and non-women lecturers were used as participants. Findings showed that educating women in any form be it formal, semi-formal or informal empowers them in fostering sustainable development especially alleviation of poverty. It was therefore recommended amongst others that all forms of hindrances militating against women education be totally eradicated.

Keywords: Women Education, Sustainable Development, Progress.

Introduction

Education is viewed as a process, product and discipline. It is seen as an activity of preserving, developing, and transmitting the culture of a nation from one generation to the other (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2005). Through education, one can acquire skills, knowledge and values to maximise his/her inborn potentials. This means that education could be used to measure the development of a country (Ahmed, Salman, Ogunlade & Ahmed, 2015). The place of education in the progress of any nation that intends achieve sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. This therefore implies that the progress of a nation does not only depend on the abundance of its revenue but on the number of its educated citizens be it men or women (Okebukola, 2014).

Women make up a large percentage of Nigeria's population and educating them is as good as educating the whole nation (Ahmed et al., 2015). According to the World Bank collection of development indicators (2021), the population of female (% of total population) in Nigeria was reported to be 49.32%. This makes up a large portion of the total population in the nation. Therefore, if this huge percentage of women/girls are educated, it would definitely lead to social, economic, political advancement in both developed, developing and underdeveloped countries (Aroge, 2016). World Bank reported that women contributed to the social and economic development by providing over 50% of the foodstuff in most part of the less developed nations (Adesanya, 2011). Infact, it was observed currently in Nigeria that educated women are the largest producers of cassava which is boosting the economic development of the nation (Bentley, Olanrewaju, Madu, Olaosebikan, Abdoulaye...& Tokula, 2017).

However, despite the power of women education to the economic development of any nation, it seems that much attention has not been given to the women education in Nigeria. For instance, low enrolment of girls in schools was observed to be due to poverty, cultural beliefs and notion that the place of the girl-child is in her husband's house. Male children are seen as more important to females and therefore given adequate education. It has also been observed that gender gap tend to be wider as females move up the formal education ladder (Obayan, 2007). In the Northern part of Nigeria, women and female children are almost seen as irrelevant whereas their male counterparts are given preferential treatment. Infact, some individuals do not even see the importance of educating their female children (Abdulazeez, 2004). If this is allowed to continue, sustainable development such as poverty alleviation, reduction in hunger and inequality may not be achieved in the nation (Ahmed et al., 2015). Educating a girl child is giving power to a nation. This paper therefore addresses the power of women education in bringing about progress and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper was to address the power of women education in progress and sustainable development of Nigeria. Specific objectives include to:

1. The power of women education in promoting societal progress in Nigeria and
2. The power of women education in the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were based on the objectives of the study. They are:

1. Does women education have power in promoting societal progress in Nigeria?
2. Does women education have power in the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is described as a construct, which envision development as meeting the need of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation (Ugoh, 2008). As a concept, it aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment (United Nations General Assembly in Emas, 2015). Sustainable development is based on the concept of development (socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints), the concept of needs (redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all) and the concept of future generations (the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations). The essence of the concept of sustainable development derives from the Triple bottom line concept, which implies the balance between three pillars of sustainability – environmental sustainability focused on maintaining the quality of the environment which is necessary for conducting the economic activities and quality of life of people, social sustainability which strives to ensure human rights and equality, preservation of cultural identity, respect for cultural diversity, race and religion, and economic sustainability necessary to maintain the natural, social and human capital required for

income and living standards (Klarin, 2018). Sustainable development goals are summarised in the figure 1:



Figure 1: UN Graphical Illustration of the 17 SDGs

2.2 Concept of Education

Education is viewed as a process, product, and discipline. As a process, it is a process of preserving, developing, and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to the other. As a product, it refers to the change which education is expected to bring about or produce which is usually a cultivated person that is economically efficient, competent, morally, intellectually and culturally sound (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2005). As a concept, education is seen as power in that it deals with the process of acquiring knowledge and ideas that shape and condition man's attitude, actions and attainments. As a process, it develops the individual's moral, physical, emotional and intellectual power for complete living and contribution to social reforms and transformation (Nnabuo & Asodike, 2010).

Women Education and Sustainable Development

Education is necessary for sustainable development in that it leads to an informed and involved individual who have creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and co-operative actions (Nnabuo & Asodike, 2010). According to Ugoh (2008), the continued sustainable development is only possible or assured when it is agreed and indeed concrete steps are taken to raise the level of literacy and numeracy in any society. Educational institutions and their programmes are therefore, the tools with which to achieve development and its sustainability. According to George, Fagbohun, Olonade & Aderoju (2018), women education dates back to the 18th century where women were being taught how to handle household chores in a bid to helping them become wives who manage their home

properly. However, in recent time, the education of women has gone beyond such non-formal setting of being home managers to that of managing small, medium and large scale businesses. Currently, women are now acquiring formal education which is assisting them to contribute effectively to the management of various sectors of the society. Women education is thus one of the major ways through which sustainable development could be achieved. For instance, through education, 'no poverty' and 'gender equality' which are sustainable development goals 1 and 5 respectively can be attained (Humphreys & Crawford, 2014). This is because education provides the woman needed tools to tackle problems as they emerge. That is, she learns to live in the now, re-orientate and adjust her life to ensure a balance in the ever-changing environment. Education also enables women to improve on their own health and wellbeing as well as that of their children, family and community at large (sustainable development goal 3) (Ngharen & Akogwu, 2017). It is therefore necessary that women be educated.

Theoretical Framework

This research work was supported by 'human capital theory'.

Human capital theory originally proposed by Theodore Schultz (1961) and developed extensively by Becker (1964). The theory emphasised increase in national output as a result of investment in human capital. Schultz also makes a direct link between an increase in investment in human capital, and the overall increase in workers earning. The theory is basically concerned with the role of human capital investment such education/training in poverty reduction and subsequently in promoting inclusive growth and the knowledge economy of a nation. Education is principally seen in terms of providing the human capital required to modernise the economy and to develop knowledge economies. The theory is based on an idealised view of the role of education as a panacea for economic development. Schultz compares the acquisition of knowledge and skills to acquiring the "means of production." Workers no longer have to be at the mercy of others; instead they can be in control of increasing their own productivity and earnings. Schultz believes that an investment to enhance human capabilities leads to an increase in human productivity, which in turn leads to a positive rate of return in the nation. He criticizes those who see investment in human capital as a cost. He argues that while in the short-term there may be a cost (i.e., cost of facility, loss of earnings for workers while in school, etc), in the long-term the yield from the investment will far outweigh the cost. He also argued that the greater the population of a nation, the more need there is for human capital investment such as education/training. This theory is relevant to this study in that women/girls form a huge population of the nation. Therefore investing in them through education/training and skill development would subsequently result in social, economic and political development of the nation in the long run. It would also lead to the attainment of sustainable development goals of a country.

Methodology

A mixed study involving quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. The population consisted of female who are lecturers and those who are not lecturers in Oyo state. A disproportionate to size sampling was used to select a sample of 30 female who are lecturers and 20 females who are not lecturers. A self designed questionnaire with a four point likert scale rating of strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) and interview were used as instruments for data collection. The questionnaire titled "Power of Women Education in Progress and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (PWEPSDQ)" was validated using face and content validity and also

subjected to Cronbach's alpha reliability method which gave a reliability coefficient value of .854. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Does women education have power in promoting societal progress in Nigeria?

Table 1: Power of Women Education in Promoting Societal Progress in Nigeria (N = 50)

SN	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	Women education is irrelevant to the society	1.356	0.78	Strongly disagreed
2	Women education benefits the family	2.901	0.65	Agreed
3	Educating women contributes largely to a nation's gross domestic profit	3.178	0.71	Agreed
4	Women contributes better to political development when educated	3.245	0.98	Agreed
5	A woman would still greatly impact the society even when uneducated	2.213	0.60	Disagreed

Key: SA = Strongly Agreed (4), A = Agreed (3), D = Disagreed (2), SD = Strongly Disagreed (1), Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation

Mean Threshold: If the mean is 0.000-1.499 = Strongly Disagreed; 1.500-2.499 = Disagreed; 2.500-3.499 = Agreed and 3.500 to 4.449 = Strongly Agreed

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents disagreed that women education is irrelevant and women can do much in impacting the society without education. However, they agreed that educating women offers benefits to the family, nation's gross, domestic profit and political development. These results imply that women education has power in promoting societal progress in the nation.

Responses from three lecturers via interview reported that "women education promotes women liberation in developing countries as it helps them to know and use their rights in the society". This finding is also in line with that of Evey & William (2015) who reported that girl child education is a panacea for women liberation in developing countries. Another respondent stated that "women have a certain way of seeing the world which men do not have and therefore not educating them would mean impoverishing the society and truncating progress". Few females who are not lecturers summarised that "not educating women limits them from participating in activities that could benefit wider society as education enables women to contribute innovative ideas for societal progress".

Additionally, a woman educator stated that "women education is a powerful tool to change the perceptions and belief system in that homes with educated girls/women have a broader outlook towards the society. Women also tend to be better at communicating: a tool women could easily use in influencing and inspiring the wider community and bringing about progress".

Some female experts (lecturers) put forth that "education makes women/girls confident, independent, have self esteem, earn respect and unleash their full potential. It helps to be able to pursue their desired dreams and professional careers, and also gained recognition in what they do in the society. This would not only increase the workforce in the nation but also productivity which leads to a boost in the nation's GDP.

Lastly, another expert noted that since a mother is usually a child's first teacher, one who is educated would be able to educate their children at the early age giving rise to better children in the society. An illiterate mother would likely raise illiterate children who would constitute nuisance to the peace and progress of the society. However, If women are educated, they will transfer that knowledge and values to all those around her which would lead to a positive ripple effect. Educating a girl child is as good as educating the whole nation. This finding corroborates the study of Tabreek (2017) who reported that educating girls is important for the overall development of society.

Research Question 2: Does women education have power in the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria?

Table 2: Power of Women Education in attainment of Sustainable Development in Nigeria (N = 50)

SN	Items (Women education)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	brings about drastic reduction in poverty	3.107	0.91	Agreed
2	results in reduced hunger	3.128	0.98	Agreed
3	leads to good health and wellbeing	3.987	0.85	Strongly Agreed
4	leads to gender equality	3.965	0.90	Strongly Agreed
5	brings about decent work and economic growth	3.764	0.87	Strongly Agreed
6	enables women to participate in peace building	2.867	0.75	Agreed

Key: SA = Strongly Agreed (4), A = Agreed (3), D = Disagreed (2), SD = Strongly Disagreed (1), Std. Dev. = Standard Deviation.

Mean Threshold: If the mean is 0.000-1.499 = Strongly Disagreed; 1.500-2.499 = Disagreed; 2.500-3.499 = Agreed and 3.500 to 4.449 = Strongly Agreed.

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents agreed that educating women brings about reduction in poverty (alleviation of poverty) and hunger. They also agreed that it enables women to participate in peace building. This result is completely supported by that of Ogakwu & Isife (2016) who also reported that education encourages women to peace building for production and sustenance of positive social change. Women education especially in the areas of entrepreneurship

would enable them to own businesses and contribute to wealth creation, employment opportunities and self reliance thus alleviating poverty and reducing hunger in the society which would in turn lead to the attainment of sustainable development (Amakiri & Kormene, 2014).

Table 2 also shows that most of the respondents strongly agreed that women education leads to good health and wellbeing, gender equality, decent work and economic growth. This finding agrees with that of Tabreek (2017) who posited that girls who are properly educated tend to marry at an appropriate age which would eventually decrease the number of child marriages and health problems. Hence with increased education, women are better able to take care of their families' health and well-being. From the interview section, an expert noted that if you educate a female who becomes a mother, you educate an entire household and lower child mortality rates. Another female expert noted that "If women are educated, they will have better understanding of nutrition, hygiene, and upbringing of their children. A child born to an educated mother is much more likely to survive past the age of five than their counterparts who are uneducated".

Conclusion

It can therefore be concluded from the findings of the study that women education is vital for sustainable progress and development in any society or nation including Nigeria.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were drawn:

1. Women should be encouraged to embrace education.
2. Government and educational stakeholders should do all they can in ensuring all that is needed for women to be educated are provided.
3. All factors causing hindrances to education of women be completely examined and eradicated.

References

- Abdulazeez, M.O, (2004). Women education: Problems and challenges. *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education*, 8, 14-17.
- Adesanya, L.A. (2011). Functional literacy for self-empowerment: perspectives and issues. *International Journal of Educational Issues*, 1(1), 23-29.
- Ahmed, M.A., Salman, M.F., Ogunlade, O.O. & Ahmed, R.B. (2015). Enhancing women/girl-child education: a panacea for national development. 2-4 February 2015- Istanbul, Turkey Proceedings of INTCESS15- 2nd International Conference on Education and Social Sciences. 672-677.
- Amakiri, A. & Kormene, C. (2014). The role of women in achieving peace and security in the society. *Journal of Gender and Women Development*, 2(1&2),73-76.
- Aroge, S. T. (2016). Socio-economic effects of women's participation on adult and non-formal education in Akoko North West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. *journal of education and human development*, 5(3), 116-121.
- Becker, G (1964). *Human Capital*. 2nd edition. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bentley, J., Olanrewaju, A., Madu, T., Olaosebikan, O., Abdoulaye, T., Wossen, T., Manyong, V., Kulakow, P., Ayedun, B., Ojide, M., Girma, G., Rabbi, I., Asumugha, G., & Tokula, M. (2017). Cassava farmers' preferences for varieties and seed dissemination system in

- Nigeria: Gender and regional perspectives. IITA Monograph, IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria. ISBN 978-978-8444-82-4. 90.
- Emas, R. (2015). The concept of sustainable development: definition and defining principles. Brief for GSDR 2015 at Florida International University. 1-3.
- Evey, C. K. & William, F.E.J.A. (2015). Girl child education: a panacea for women liberation in developing countries: a case for sustainable development and global competitiveness in the 21st century. Nigeria perspective. *World Educators Forum*, 6(1), 1-7.
- George, T., Fagbohun, M., Olonade, O. & Aderoju, R. (2018). Rethinking women's access to education: A. panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria. Proceedings of EDULEARN18 Conference 2nd-4th July 2018, Palma, Mallorca, Spain. 9474-9480.
- Humphreys, S. & Crawford, L. (2014). Review of the literature on basic education in Nigeria: Issues of Access, Quality, Equity, and Impact. Abuja: EDOREN. Available at <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=review-of-the-literature-on-basic-education-in-nigeria.pdf&site=320>.
- Klarin, T. (2018). The concept of sustainable development: From its beginning to the contemporary issues. *Zagreb International Review of Economics and Business*, 21(1), 67-94
- Ngharen, A.Z. & Akogwu, C.E. (2017). Gender Equality, Education and Sustainable Development in Nigeria in the 21st century: An Appraisal. *International Journal of Advanced Studies in Economics and Public Sector Management*, 5(1) 203-214.
- Nnabuo, P. O.M. & Asodike, J.D. (2010). Exploring education as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(10), 1-11.
- Obayan, P. (2007). *African Education in the EFA Decade*. Ibadan: Mosuro Publisher. 1-10.
- Ogakwu, V.N. & Isife, T.C. (2016). Women education and sustainable development: A panacea for peace building in South East Nigeria. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 21(11), 1-6.
- Okebukola, P. A. O. (2014). Enhancing the Contributions of Women and the Girl-child to National Development. Abeokuta: Institute of African Culture and International Understanding. 2-9.
- Okorosaye-Orubite, A.K. (2005). *Education and Development in School and Society*, Eds., Agabi, G.O. Okorosaye-Orubite, A.K, Ezekiel-Kart, J, & Egbezor, D.E. Port Harcourt: Davidstones Pub. Ltd.
- Schultz, T. (1961). Investment in human capital. *The American Economic Review*, 51(1), 1-17
- Tabreek, S. (2017). Importance of educating girls for the overall development of society: A global perspective. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 7(1), 125-139. DOI:10.5590/JERAP.2017.07.1.10.
- Ugoh, S.C. (2008). Oil politics and crisis of development in the Niger Delta. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 10, (2) 91-115.
- The World Bank, World Development Indicators (2021). GNI per capita, Atlas method [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>.