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Education as Instrument for Women Emancipation and Empowerment in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: The ultimate goal of education is change that makes society better but societal view that the women occupies a subordinate position in relation to the men has been at the center of academic discourse over the past decades. As women began to progress educationally, they were empowered to do certain things and gradually emancipated from some unpleasant and degrading positions. Objective: The objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which education has enhanced the emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. Methodology: Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1450 working class women in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select 145 respondents. A 23-item structured questionnaire titled, Women Emancipation and Empowerment Questionnaire (WEEQ) was used for data collection. The weighted mean was used to analyse the data obtained. Results: The results revealed that the roles played by education in the emancipation and empowerment of women include; acquisition of literacy, acquisition of diverse skills and knowledge which enable them to engage in various occupations, among others. Conclusion: The researchers concluded that it is pertinent to understand that if there are better educated female populations, national development will be fostered through the changes that can be expected in the nature of labour force and society in general. Education has emancipated women from the unpleasant and degrading positions such as illiteracy, early marriage and betrothal of girls during childhood. With education, women have started to play the roles and enjoy the status they did not enjoy before.

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of education is change that makes society better. Education certainly brings about changes, which are not readily envisaged. The first tremendous change brought about by western education was in the area of literacy (Onyia, 2002). Oyelowo (2005) reveals that it was lack of literacy that was responsible for the negative beliefs and superstitions held by Nigerians, which led to negative actions like relegating women to the background. In the traditional Nigerian society for instance, women were disadvantaged educationally and in all other aspects of life. The woman is under the man either as a wife, daughter or sister. In which case, she should be below the man and not above or equal to him. According to Nagash (2008) women are deprived of equal access to education, health care, capital and decision making powers in the political, social and business sectors.

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The view that the woman occupies a subordinate position in relation to the man is supported by Ogionwo (2009) who observed that the woman is subject to obey and respect her husband. The woman is meant to be an assistant to the man. In most Nigerian societies, men are held in higher esteem than women so that at birth there is more joy for a male than a female child. There are even sayings like "A lady should be seen not heard". Supporting this statement, Agwu (2009) remarked that Hausa women are put in the purdah and only rarely come out to be seen in the larger society. An Igala wife may not sit at table with her husband; it is unbecoming and disrespectful. She should respectfully bring the dish and on one knee serve it to her husband and withdraw. After he has eaten, she will now come and collect the dish and go to wash it. An Igbo wife does not call her husband by his name but finds a respectful way of calling him.

Besides, when men are discussing serious matter women should withdraw. Following this trend, when western education was introduced in Nigeria, males were given preference to females. Fafunwa in Onyia (2002) asserted that there were more male pupils in schools than females. There were more schools specifically for males than for females. Parents, especially fathers, saw little sense spending their resources to educate female children who would carry all the investments in their education to their husbands. When a girl or girls came first on the line in the family, they were just prepared for marriage as early as possible and the bride price from their marriage was reserved for the education of the younger male children.

With time the situation began to change. Parents, especially among the educated elite, began to give equal chance of education to both their male and female children. Eze (2008) posited that gradually parents began to see education as a duty they owe their children whether male or female. As women began to progress educationally, they were empowered to do certain things and gradually emancipated from some unpleasant and degrading positions. Madu (2007) defined emancipation as the state of being free from legal, political and social restriction. Women were victims of social restriction. The general belief was that women were not fit for public duties. A wide spread feature of life in most traditional societies as observed by Nwangwu (2005) had been the seclusion of women and restriction of many of their activities. Supporting this common belief, Nwanunobi (2009) pointed out that women were forbidden to own property, to engage in politics, to pursue education or to engage in virtually any activity outside the walls of their domicile. A girl would be betrothed to a man when she was a child and who she would have to marry when she grew up, whether she liked him or not. The worst is that girls were circumcised and most of them suffered serious injuries, which caused problems during child birth and other social implications. Many women experience social and psychological problems due to the genital mutilation (female circumcision) as a result of ignorance. Through education women were emancipated from the social restriction (Otti, 2006). Emancipation of women through education culminated to empowerment. According to Nwangwu (2005) empowerment is giving somebody the power or authority to do something. Thus, women began to play roles and enjoy the status they did not enjoy before. From the foregoing, it is deemed necessary to investigate the extent to which education has enhanced emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria.

Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to investigate the extent to which education has enhanced emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria. Specifically, the researchers sought to determine the status of Nigerian women before the introduction of western education in Nigeria; and to verify the extent to which education has enhanced the emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria. This study will be anchored on structural-functionalism theory by Emile Durkheim (1944). This theory is basically a theory of social survival. It is a macro sociological perspective that is based on the premise that society is made up of independent parts, each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole society. The theory emphasized that the society is like the human body just as the human body is made up of various parts that need to function together and properly for it to be in a state of equilibrium. The structural-functionalism theorist believes that education is one force that unifies the different parts of the society. The theory maintained that the purpose of an organism is to survive in its environment. Therefore, in order for the society to survive, every integral part of the society must function in ways that will promote development in the society as a whole. Based on this theory women are integral part of the society and must be given opportunity to be functional like every other integral part of the society. This means that women must be allowed to contribute to the society. Therefore, education which is an indispensable tool for empowerment must be made accessible to every individual irrespective of gender.

Research Questions

- i. What is the status of Nigerian women before the introduction of western education in Nigeria?
- ii. To what extent has education enhanced the emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria?

1. Methodology:

Design of the Study: The design of the study was a descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey was chosen for the study since it aims at collecting data, and describing them in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population.

Area of the Study: The study was carried out in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. Udi is one of the seventeen local government areas in Enugu State. It is located at the centre of the state between Ezeagu and Nkanu Local Government Areas. Udi local government is inhabited by people from all walks of life including women. This necessitated the choice of the area for the study to verify the extent to which education has emancipated and empowered women in that area.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised 1450 women who are working in government parastatal in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State (source: Enugu State Civil Service Commission 2016).

Sample and Sampling Technique: The sample size of the study consisted of 145 respondents sampled from the entire population. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 145 women which constituted 10% of the entire population. Nwana (2008) states that, if the population of a study is in a few hundred, a 40% or more samples will do, if many hundreds, 20% sample will do, if in few thousand, 10% will do and if several thousands, 5% will do.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument used for the study was questionnaire titled "Women Emancipation and Empowerment Questionnaire (WEEQ)". The instrument was divided into two clusters with 23 items developed from literature and used to elicit information from the respondents. Cluster one was built on a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD), with corresponding value of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. Cluster Two was also built on a four-point scale of very great extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE). The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from Sociology of Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and the coefficient of 0.88 was obtained.

Method of Data Collection: The researchers with the help of two research assistants administered the copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. They equally collected the instruments on the spot to ensure high return of these questionnaire items.

Method of Data Analysis: The mean statistics was used to analyse the data obtained. A mean score of 3.50-4.49 was accepted as Very Great Extent, 2.50-3.49 was accepted as Great Extent while 1.50-2.49 was Low Extent and 1.00-1.49 showed Very Low Extent.

2. Results:

Table 1: Mean responses of the status of Nigerian women before the introduction of western education.

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Decision
1.	Illiteracy	3.82	SA
2.	Economic dependence	3.75	SA
3.	Early marriage	3.81	SA
4.	Betrothal at childhood	3.78	SA
5.	Non involvement in any decision making even when the matter to be discussed affect them directly.	3.75	SA
6.	Exclusion from inheritance	3.84	SA
7.	Lack of political awareness and experience	3.72	SA
8.	Lack of legal and reproductive rights	3.75	SA
9.	Poor knowledge of home management and nutritional value	3.65	SA
10.	Limited freedom	3.62	SA

Table 1 indicates that all the respondents agreed that the identified items were the status of Nigerian Women before the introduction of western education in Nigeria. They include; illiteracy, economic dependence, early marriage, betrothal at childhood, non-involvement in any decision making, exclusion from inheritance, lack of political awareness and experience, lack of legal and reproductive rights, poor knowledge of home management and limited freedom. The mean ratings of the items ranged from 3.62 to 3.84 for the ten items. The cluster mean of 3.74 which was above the criterion mean of 2.50 confirmed the findings.

Table 2: Mean responses of the extent to which education has enhanced the emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria.

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Decision
11.	Acquisition of literacy	3.75	VGE
12.	Early marriage is minimized	3.82	VGE
13.	The practice of betrothal is reduced in many places	3.76	VGE
14.	Girls can now choose their marriage partners.	3.68	VGE
15.	Females are no longer limited to certain subject areas.	3.71	VGE
16.	Women can now take paid employment to gain financial independence.	3.85	VGE
17.	Through education women have acquired diverse skills and knowledge which enable them to engage in various occupations.	3.72	VGE
18.	Many women are the bread winners of their families.	3.70	VGE
19.	Education empowers many women to participate actively in politics.	3.65	VGE
20.	Genital mutilation (female circumcision) is reduced.	3.60	VGE
21.	Through the knowledge of family planning, many women can apply birth control measures in order to have the number of children they can adequately provide for.	3.72	VGE
22.	Education empowers women to participate in decision making from the family to the larger society.	3.40	GE
23.	Some women are now given the opportunity to inherit the family property.	3.35	GE

Table 2 indicates the extent to which the items are the roles played by education on emancipation and empowerment of Nigerian women. This was confirmed from their responses which ranged from 3.29 to 3.85. The results obviously indicated that education played significant roles on emancipation and empowerment of Nigerian women.

Discussion:

The major focus of this study was to investigate the extent to which education has enhanced the emancipation and empowerment of women in Nigeria. The findings of the study are clear evidence that education plays vital roles in emancipating and empowering women in Nigeria. The findings are in consonance with the findings of Oyelowo (2005) and Nagash (2008) who discovered that women are disadvantaged educationally and in all other aspects of life. They are deprived equal access to education, health care, capital and decision making powers in the political, social and business sectors. The findings of this study are also in agreement with the findings of Ogionwo (2009) which portrayed that the woman is subjected to obey and respect her husband. The man is held in higher esteem than the woman.

The findings of the study also concurred with the findings of Eze (2008) and Nwangwu (2005). They observed that as time went on parents, especially among the educated elite began to give equal chance of education to both their male and female children. Girls were betrothed to men at childhood. The findings equally are in line with those of Madu (2007) and Nwanunobi (2009) who ascertained that women were forbidden to own property, to engage in politics to pursue education, engage in any activity outside the walls of their domicile. Thus, women now engage in various occupations even the ones that were previously considered to be the preserve of men based on physical difference between men and women. The findings also revealed that early marriage is minimized and that girls are no longer betrothed at childhood. They can now choose their life partners after graduation from school. To that end, the ultimate goal of education which is change that makes society better is gradually being achieved and as women continue to progress educationally, they will be more empowered to do more things and gain full emancipation from any unpleasant and degrading positions.

Conclusion:

The ultimate goal of education which is change that makes society better is gradually being achieved and as women continue to progress educationally, they will be more empowered to do more things and gain full emancipation from any unpleasant and degrading positions. Education has emancipated women from the unpleasant and degrading positions such as illiteracy, early marriage and betrothal of girls during childhood. With education, women have started to play the roles and enjoy the status they did not enjoy before. Thus, it is pertinent to understand that if there are better educated female populations, national development will be fostered through the changes that can be expected in the nature of labour force and society in general. Therefore, various governments should make education of girls free and compulsory at all levels of education to motivate them to go to school in the places where they are disadvantaged. Seminars should be organized in rural areas to sensitize parents on the importance of girl-child education. Government should place embargo on girl-child marriage and child betrothal. There should be equality in educational opportunities offered to males and females to enable both sexes acquire knowledge and skill needed in various occupations and other social issues.

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