

**ABSTRACT**

Gender equality in higher education or the issues surrounding the participation of women in higher education were acknowledged and deliberated upon as early as the second half of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, worldwide, many of these debates are as relevant today as they were a hundred and fifty years ago. Attracting and retaining women in higher education, particularly research, continue to be a challenge for governments across the globe. Best practices in work spaces – research institutions, universities, R&D industries – as well as across disciplines, to attract and retain the women workforce is a matter of much concern. Since the competition to remain and advance in academic careers begins immediately after the attainment of a doctoral degree, it is important for women to establish themselves during their early 30s, a period that coincides for most women with marriage and family commitments. Thus, as a compromise, a large number of qualified women scientists opt for under-graduate or school level teaching, while others completely drop out of a research career. This has serious implications for the loss of trained human power for the country.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of becoming critically aware of one's reality in a manner that leads to effective action upon it. An educated man/woman understands his/her world well enough to deal with it effectively. Such men/women if they existed in sufficient numbers would not leave the absurdities of the present world unchanged. In the opinion of Edukugho (2002) cited in Imogie (2002), the prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenue, nor the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its cultivated citizens, men (and women) of education, enlightenment and character. Women from time immemorial have been saddled with many family responsibilities and are traditionally assigned many roles including custody of children, maintenance of the home, feeding of the family, and preservation of family health. Consequent upon those traditional role expectations, they become a significant factor in socioeconomic and political development of a country. Another challenge before her is that imposed on her as the first and the last teacher of the child before and after school. This is especially pertinent because, she is expected to prepare the child to be able to cope with the challenges of the contemporary world. The simple implication of this reality is that the typical contemporary woman is not likely to play these roles efficiently unless she is fortified with adequate and functional education.

WOMEN EDUCATION

The home ideally is the first and the last school of the child and the foundation of his/her socialization with the mother serving as the first teacher. India is the second largest country in the world so far as population is concerned. But so far as education is concerned it is a backward country. In the past, women did not receive any education at all. They were not allowed to come out of the four walls of their houses. Domestic works were their only education. During the British rule in India some noble social thinkers of the time paid their attention to the education of woman in our country. Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar was famous reformers who gave emphasis on the education of women. They put forth a very strong argument. Man and woman are like the two sides of a coin. Without one, the other cannot exist. If women are uneducated, the future generations will be uneducated. For this reason the Greek warrior Napoleon once said, "Give me a few educated mothers; I shall give you a heroic race."

In day to day life, the real problems are faced first by women and then the same problems convey to men for a

solution. If the women are educated, they can solve all the problems of their houses. Very often, the working men of some families become handicapped in unfortunate accidents. In that situation, the complete burden of the family rests on the women of the families. To meet this exigency woman should be educated. They should be employed in different spheres. Women can work as teachers, doctors, lawyers and administrators. Educated women are good mothers. Education of women can be helpful in eradicating many social evils such as dowry problem, unemployment problem, etc. Social peace can easily be established.

NEED FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Women empowerment can only be achieved through the provision of adequate and functional education to the women folk. This is crucial because no matter how rich or vast a nation is, without an effective, efficient, adequate and functional education for all its citizens (men and women) education which is relevant to its immediate needs, goals and objectives, such a nation would find it difficult to stand on its own. The brand of education being advocated is that type of education in which is embedded the spirit of self realization and all that are needed for the country's overall development like mass literacy, economic empowerment etc. (Esere, 2001).

The need for women's education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and/or guidance and counselling. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction.

In the spirit of Universal Basic Education (UBE), provision of formal and functional education is needed for the women folk, because:

1. It would empower them to know and ask for their rights to education, health, shelter, food clothing etc.
2. It would empower them to fight against every form of discrimination against their folk, assert themselves about their right to equal treatment with their men's counterpart as bonafide citizens of this nation, Nigeria.

3. It would enable the women to take decisions and accept responsibilities for taking such decisions concerning themselves.
4. It would give economic power to the women and thereby enable them to contribute their quota to the economic growth of the nation.
5. It would empower the women scientifically through exposure to science and technological education for the challenges of the present technological age and information computer technology break through unfolding world wide.
6. It would help women to reduce maternal and infant mortality through improved nutrition, improved child rearing practices, health care and prevention against killer diseases.
7. It would avail women with the opportunity of participating keenly in the world of sophisticated politics and governance as enlightened citizens.

PROBLEMS AGAINST WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Three fundamental barriers have been identified by Awe (1990) to be responsible for low level of development and enhancement of women especially for educational advancement. These barriers are;

- 1) Restricted access to education
- 2) Reluctance to aspire and
- 3) Resistance to women's advancement within a patriarchal system

Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts.

Reluctance to aspire is another major problem against women's education. Resistance to women's advancement within a patriarchal system is a further manifestation of our cultural practices which overtly and covertly interact to hinder women advancement especially from an educational viewpoint. This resistance is further engendered by cultural impediments imposed on women by her traditional assigned roles of housewife, mother, baby sitter, member of inferior sex, stereotyped gender victim, among others.

CONCLUSION

After independence, there has been a tremendous increase in institutions of higher learning in all disciplines. But with the quantitative growth has it been able to attend to the core issue of quality. India is today one of the fastest developing countries of the world with the annual growth rate going above 9%. In order to sustain that rate of growth, there is need to increase the number of institutes and also the quality of higher education in India. Report of the National Knowledge Commission if implemented can help boost education sector in India. We are moving towards an era which would be defined by the parameters of knowledge and wisdom. India in order to become a developed nation by 2020 and knowledge power by 2015. The decisions that are going to be taken on these are likely to hold the key to India's future as a center of knowledge production.

We need higher educated people who are skilled and who can drive our economy forward. When India can provide skilled people to the outside world then we can transfer our country from a developing nation to a developed nation very easily and quickly. According to Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohan Singh 'The time has come to create a second wave of institution building and of excellence in the fields of education, research and capability building'. We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adapt to the changing needs of a changing society, a changing economy and a changing world. The thrust of

public policy for higher education in India has to be to address these challenges. However, one university can't make much difference. If the government welcomes more such initiatives, the future will be ours. We will be able to match and compete with other countries and the dream to be the world's greatest economy won't be difficult to achieve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If education must serve the society, it must produce people who carry much more than certificates. It must produce people, both normal and exceptional ones, with the right types of knowledge, ability and attitude to put them to work for the good of the society. The government and other stakeholders in women affairs and development should strive to create conducive enabling, socio-political and economic conditions which will discourage early marriage, societal preference for male children and the traditional belief that the position of a woman is in the kitchen.

1. Parents and opinion leaders should encourage the members of the female sex to be more enterprising in their educational pursuit as a way of contributing meaningfully to national development.
2. Government should be more forthcoming in terms of women empowerment policy formulation and implementation, especially in term of legislating against obnoxious customs and practices which are detrimental to women's optimal functionality and well being, like legislating against harmful widowhood practices.
3. The government should fund counselling centers at all levels of education system adequately to enable counselors provide all round functional guidance and counselling to parents and other stakeholders. This is imperative if all concerned must be assisted to see the female child first as a human being with all assets capable of immeasurable achievements.

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