



PERCEIVED ROLE OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF MUBI NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGERIA

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Abstract:

In Nigeria and in Mubi North Local Government Area in particular, the girl-child access to basic education was observed to be at its lowest ebb. The reasons for this may revolve around religious and cultural beliefs. This study examined the role of women education in national development; particularly in the aspect of children's health and educational attainment. The sample for the study consisted of 200 women randomly selected from five villages in Mubi North Local Government Area of Adamawa State in Nigeria. A checklist was used to collect data from the respondents. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Guttman's Split-Half statistic. This yielded a reliability value of 0.80. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages and Kolmogorov-Smirnov z two samples test. Results of data analysis showed that women education could play a significant role towards improving the health and education of children. The study also identified male-child preference, early marriage, cultural and religious misinterpretation as the major factors militating against female education, particularly in Mubi North Local Government Area of Adamawa. Based on these findings, it was recommended that Government should make women education compulsory and free at the basic education level.

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1. Introduction

In Nigeria, girl-child access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school (Unicef, 2007). Amazigbo (in Negess, 1995) stated that in Northern Nigeria, a large number of young girls still do not attend school. It has been discovered also that 70% of Nigerian women aged 35 years and above are illiterate. The level of illiteracy is said to be thrice as high in the rural areas when compared with the urban areas (Oniye, 2012). According to U.S Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percent of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. Additionally, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary school (Gender Statistics, 2010). The statistics showed that out of 774 million illiterate adults worldwide, 64 percent are women. The potential contribution of educated and trained women to labour force and the importance of their education in the improvement of family welfare and planning are factors still under-estimated in Mubi North Local Government Area.

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. Another challenge before her is the cultural responsibility 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 (Oniye, 2012). The importance of women education in enhancing the education of their children is succinctly put in the old adage which states that "*to educate a man is to educate a person, but to educate a woman is to educate a nation*". A woman's influence, especially educated woman, could permeate the lives of her children and other people around her. Stressing the importance of women education, Mallum (in Ogodulinwa & Okwudire, 1993) opined that women as home-makers, educators and health administrators need education more than men.

Olaleye (2012) contends that for women as a special group, education gives them a better chance to control their lives, to earn money, to be better mothers and to have improved relationship with their spouses. Baba (2012) opines that women are instruments for providing sustainable economic development. This is because it equips them with the skills and abilities needed to contribute meaningfully to the growth and

development of themselves and the nation. Fadeiye (2005) stated that the contributions of women in all spheres of human endeavour to the overall development of the home, the community, the state, the nation and the world at large could no longer be dismissed with the wave of the hand.

Okafor (1984) defines education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of all his potentialities. Amaele (2011) defines education as the total development of the individual child through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute to the enhancement of the society. This means that education inculcates in the individual, knowledge, skills, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization. It is clear that education trains an individual to be useful to the society and to meet up with the needs of the society for national development. Without education, a nation cannot get the needed manpower for material advancement and enlightenment of its citizenry. The trained engineers, teachers, medical doctors are all products of education. This explains why it is argued that the quality of a nation's education determine the levels of its national development. Nsamenang (2011) defines education as the process by which a novice gradually acquires knowledge, skills, values and a disposition to life appropriate to the developmental stage of his cultural world and for adjustment to the changing world. It involves both teaching and learning as lifelong process in and out of school setting. Education is therefore, the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult (male or female) develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he/she lives. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enables him to function effectively as a member of the society. Women education means the process by which women acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society.

Education can only be useful and meaningful when it brings about positive changes in one's life and empowers a woman to face day-to-day challenges. Education provides knowledge and skills of reading, writing, simple arithmetic and problem solving and for improving the quality of life. Education, particularly of girls and women, could help to control excessive population growth, by promoting the concepts of family planning, collective health and well-being. An educated family makes informed choices with respect to having a child as well as for maintaining their own and their children's health. Female education could be an important inverse predictor of fertility in the country. Educated women are likely to have fewer children than uneducated women. An extra year of schooling reduces female fertility by as much as 5 to 10 per cent (Unicef, 2007). Girl-child education also helps in reducing children and maternal mortality rates (Unicef, 2007).

Nigeria is craving for patriotic citizens to develop her potentials politically, economically, socially and technologically. The lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion, fear and tendency towards violent confrontation could only be addressed through the provision of functional education to all citizens irrespective of gender, religious profession and geography. Ethno-political religious violence and marginalization of ethnic majority by the minority are threatening the Nigerian state even to the point of disintegration. Women constitute a powerful instrument in the achievement of national stability and integration. This can be achieved through inter-religious and inter-ethnic marriages between and among the diverse ethno-religious groups in the country. Traditional rulers might have used this strategy in the past in order to control conquered territory and silence opposition. The Federal Government in Nigeria should therefore formulate relevant policies that will encourage and fund inter-ethnic and inter-religious marriages. This will contribute in no small measure in the achievement of national stability and integration. The actualization of these goals is dependent on the provision of functional education to the citizenry especially women who, as mothers, are the teachers of the child in his/her first and last school (i.e., home). Thus, unless the mother is adequately enlightened, she cannot inculcate in the child the spirit and principle of true patriotism, national stability and integration (Oniye, 2012). According to Alele (1986), the benefits derivable from women education includes; enhancement of the quality of living-food, housing, health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. If the vast majority of our women are educated, their personal development can be enhanced remarkably, and their children and husbands also stand to gain tremendously. In all communities, the education of parents, especially mothers, is one of the most effective ways of helping young children (McCrary & Royer, 2006).

Enemuo (1999) pointed out that education helps in the fulfillment of women's obligation. A married woman is expected to take care of her home (husband and children). She is expected to use whatever knowledge and skills she has to cook, clean and care for her children. There is the likelihood that a woman who is able to read about health care, nutrition, body changes, modern household equipment, etc., may perform creditably well in her God-given responsibility to the home and society at large. An educated woman may be able to help her children with their school assignments. She may also go beyond that to further enlighten them in their school work, attend Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and inquire about the academic performances of her children. This will ensure blissful homes, well-educated and well-behaved children, contented husbands and an endowed nation. This study assumes that education has cumulative effect over generations because better educated mothers have healthier better educated children who, they as parents are better prepared to nurture and educate their own children.

In spite of all the laudable goals and objectives of education, Nigerian women, especially in Mubi North LGA may still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which could militate against their personal and national development. According to the 1991 Census results, as much as 61% of the Nigerian Women's (44 million) population suffers from intellectual poverty (Ojuolape, 2000). Poverty and economic issues, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, inadequate school infrastructure, cultural and religious misinterpretation may be the main issues that prevent girls from going to school. With almost 70 per cent of the Nigerian population living below the poverty line, girls are often sent to work in the markets or hawk wares on the streets. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy may also prevent girls from going to school. A lot of girls in the study area were seen to have dropped out of school before reaching primary six. The researcher also observed that most schools in the study area lack adequate classroom space, furniture and equipment, and are often too remotely located. Water, health and sanitation facilities are usually inadequate while pupil-teacher ratios could be as high as 1:100 in urban slums (Unicef, 2007). Many Nigerian parents, especially from large families with limited resources, may prefer to enroll the boys in school rather than girls. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of Islamic religion (Odili, Omotor & Pessu, 2003). Thus, this study examined the extent to which women education could help in ensuring the health and educational attainment of their children.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Many children often suffer academic neglect as a result of illiteracy among rural women. Many a time mothers wish to help their children to excel academically, but they are incapacitated by their lack of formal education. A number of factors combined together to influence the child health and academic attainment, these include mother's educational status, family socio-economic status, the child's home and school environment among others. Among these factors, the mother is the key to the success or otherwise of the child in terms of health and academic attainment. Thus, this study focuses on finding the perceived role of women education on the health and educational attainment of their children.

1.2 Objectives the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. find out the major problems militating against the provision of Women Education in Mubi North Local Government Area;
2. compare the family health status of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area; and

3. compare the children's educational attainment of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area.

1.3 Research Question

The following research question was raised to guide the study: "*What are the major problems militating against Women Education in Mubi North Local Government Area?*"

1.4 Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the family health status of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between children's educational attainment of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area.

2. Materials and Methods

Ex-post facto research design was used for this study. The proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 200 subjects out of the estimated population of 72,850 women in Mubi North Local Government Area.

The instrument used in this study was the checklist. The checklist contained 21 items and was used to collect data to answer the research question and to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. The instrument was face and content validated by some experts and experienced staff in the Department of Science Education, Adamawa State University, Mubi. To test the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted in the study area. Although the subjects used were in the population of the study, it is not however within the sample for this study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Guttman's Split-Half statistic. This yielded a reliability value of 0.80.

Frequency counts and simple percentage were used to answer the research question while Kolmogorov-Smirnov z two samples test was used to test the two hypotheses formulated for the study. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov z two samples test was found to be more appropriate because it is one of the most useful and general non-parametric methods for comparing two samples. The method is sensitive to order and is not affected by sample size. It is also suitable for unequal dataset.

3. Results

Research Question: *What are the major problems militating against Women Education in Mubi North Local Government Area?* Descriptive results of respondents on the major

problems militating against women education in the study area were used to address this question. The finding is hereby summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency Counts and Percentages of Responses on the Major Problems Militating against Women Education in the Study Area

S/No.	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Lack of money to pay fees and buy books.	161	80.5
2.	Negative attitude of some parent toward women education.	157	78.5
3.	Ignorance on the part of the parents on the value of women Education.	157	78.5
4.	There is a heavy demand on girl's time to perform household task which makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their school work.	106	53
5.	Unwillingness on the part of the female students to go to school.	134	67
6.	Early marriage affects women chance of getting educated.	142	71
7.	Harassment from male students and teachers makes female students to dislike school.	83	41.5
8.	Religious belief makes me not to be educated.	71	35.5
9.	Some parents prefer to educate their male children than their female children.	148	74
10.	Unwanted pregnancies make female students to drop out of school.	148	74

Table 1 shows the problems militating against women education in Mubi North Local Government Area as identified by both educated and illiterate women. These problems include, financial constraint (80.5%), ignorance on the value of education and negative attitude of parents (78.5%), unwanted pregnancy (74%), male child preference (74%), early marriage (71%), unwillingness on the part of female student to go to school (67%) and domestic chores (53%).

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between family health status of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area. The data obtained from respondents on the difference between family health status of educated women and illiterate women in the study area were subjected to analysis using the Kolmogorov Smirnov z test. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Kolmogorov Smirnov Analysis of Differences in Family Health Status of the Respondents

N	Item	Educated		Illiterate	
		Cum. Freq.	Cum. %	Cum. Freq.	Cum. %
200	I maintain good health because I enjoy good nourishment.	84	0.18	89	0.23
	I have immunized all my children.	170	0.36	167	0.44
	I have access to good medical care in my community.	243	0.51	241	0.63
	I can afford to pay for my medical bills whenever the need arises.	318	0.67	279	0.73
	I have limited the number of children; I have to properly take care of them.	394	0.83	331	0.87
	I patronize traditional healers and herbalist than doctors.	409	0.86	352	0.93
I have access to medical tips from the media.		473	1.00	380	1.00
df					
K-s Calculated					
K-s Critical					
Decision		Significant			

Table 2 shows that the difference between the health status of educated and illiterate women in Mubi North Local Government Area is significant in favour of the educated women ($K-s$ calculated = 0.12 > $K-S$ critical = 0.09). This indicates that the women's education significantly affect the level of their family health. Thus the null hypothesis one is rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between children's educational attainment of Educated Women and Illiterate Women in Mubi North Local Government Area. The responses of the educated and illiterate women on their children's educational attainment was obtained and subjected to further analysis. The Kolmogorov Smirnov test result is hereby presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Kolmogorov Smirnov Analysis of Differences in Children's Educational Attainment of Educated and Illiterate Women in Mubi North LGA

N	Item	Educated		Illiterate	
		Cum. Freq.	Cum. %	Cum. Freq.	Cum. %
	My children have the best education so far.	71	0.14	65	0.16`
	I am interested in my children school work and I assist my children with their school work.	158	0.32	113	0.28
200	I am willing to encourage and sponsor my children in school.	244	0.49	194	0.39
	I attend PTA meetings and visit my children's school to monitor their achievement.	324	0.65	232	0.58
	I can afford to pay my children school fee regularly.	397	0.79	290	0.73
	I prefer to send my children to go to farm or hawk wares in the morning rather than sending them to school.	413	0.83	307	0.77
	I encourage my children by buying special gift for them whenever they perform better in school.	499	1.00	398	1.00
df	-0.02 0.04 0.10 0.07 0.06 0.09 0.00				
K-s Calculated			0.10		
K-s Critical			0.09		
Decision			Significant		

Table 3 shows that the difference between the quality of life of educated and illiterate women in the educational attainment of their children in Mubi North Local Government Area. The hypothesis tested was significant ($K-S z \text{ calculated} = 0.10 > K-S \text{ critical} = 0.09$). Hence, the null hypothesis two was rejected. This indicates that the women's education significantly influences their children's educational attainment.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study found out that the major problems affecting women education in Mubi North Local Government Area as collectively agreed upon by both educated and illiterate women include financial constraint, ignorance and negative attitude of parents, unwanted pregnancy, male child preference, early marriage and unwillingness on the part of female student to go to school. Many illiterate parents in the study area considered women's education as a waste of funds. Such parents believed that money spent on a girl's education is a waste, since she will soon marry into her husband's family, thus leaving only boys in their original family to cater for them. Some of the

illiterate women interviewed during data collection said that they dropped out of school due to early pregnancies, early marriages and heavy demand on their time to perform household tasks. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Ojobo (2008), Okeke, (2004), Odili, Omotor and Pessu (2003) and Alele (1986) who reported that some parents have negative attitudes towards women's education, especially illiterate parents who are fond of withdrawing their daughters from school and given them early in marriage.

The study also found out that religious belief and harassment from male teachers and students were found not to be major problems affecting women education in Mubi North Local Government Area. This is at variance with the finding of (Ojuoloape, 2000) who reported that the forces of religion are also partly responsible for the present plight of women's education in Nigeria.

One of the finding of this study revealed that the families of educated women are healthier than those of illiterate women. The educated women might have been exposed basic rule of hygiene in schools and have access to medical tips from media which makes them well-informed and healthier than their illiterate counterparts. Women education also helps in reducing child and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. This is in line with Enemuo (1999) who pointed out that education helps in the fulfillment of women's obligation. A married woman is expected to take care of her home (husband and children). She is expected to use whatever knowledge and skills she has to cook, clean and rear her children. There is no doubt that a woman who is able to read about health care, nutrition, body changes, modern household equipment, etc., may perform creditably well her God-given responsibility to the home and society at large.

On the educational attainment of children, the study revealed that children of educated mothers are likely to benefit more academically than their illiterate counterparts. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and, consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come. The children of educated women have more advantage over the children of illiterate women because educated women can assist their children with their school work and teach them at home which most illiterate women could not do. This also agrees with the finding of Enemuo (1999) who stated that an educated woman will be able to help her children with their school assignments. She may also go beyond that to further enlighten them in their school work, attend Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and inquire about the academic performances of her children. 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. This study therefore establishes that women education has cumulative effect over generations because better

educated mothers have healthier and better educated children who, as parents are better prepared to nurture and educate their own children.

The inference that can be drawn from the outcomes of this study is that women education could play a crucial role in all aspects of national development. These include, enhancing the health and educational attainment of their children, moral growth and regeneration, development of high sense of patriotism as well as citizenship.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were suggested: The study found out that ignorance and negative attitude of some illiterate parents are responsible for low enrollment of female students in our schools. It was therefore recommended that government, non-governmental organization, stake holders in education should intensify enlightenment campaign on the importance of women education in order to stress the value of women education to parents and women particularly.

Families of educated women maintain good health than those of illiterate women. Thus, health education, food and nutrition should be incorporated into adult literacy programmes for illiterate women.

The children of educated mothers benefited more academically than their counterparts from illiterate mothers. Therefore, women should be encouraged to enroll in adult literacy class to possess the basic knowledge so as to assist their children in their academic pursuit.

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