

The Impact of the Role of Women in Education

G. N. Ezeh¹, U. C. Iwuchukwu², E. E. Atimati³, G. A. Chukwudebe⁴

Department of Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Federal University of Technology,
Owerri, NIGERIA.

¹ ugoezeh2002@yahoo.com, ² uchennaji@yahoo.com,
³ mailehinomen@yahoo.com, ⁴ gachukwudebe@futo.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

In this work, the impact of the role of women in education is investigated. Since Nigeria joined the rest of the world to allow women to participate fully in the society; from going to school to doing formal jobs, she has witnessed a remarkable improvement in educational sector and the workplace at large. However, a lot more needs to be done to the present poor quality control of standards in schools and the decadence in the country. The research addresses the gender distribution at various levels of education to determine if there is adequate population of women to make the required impact, given that- the hand that rocks the cradle determines a nation's development. From the study, it was observed that notable Nigerian women achievers had good education. The statistics from Imo state, reveal that the number of female teachers outnumber males at both primary and secondary schools by more than 80%, even with the decrease in number of teachers over time, due to poor remuneration, there was a continuous increase in female teachers. On the other hand, at the tertiary institutions, women were greatly under-represented in teaching, research and administrative positions. In view of the crucial role of quality education in development, and higher education in particular, there is an urgent need to involve more women at administrative positions in the reform of the educational sector due to their courage and passion to drive reform. Leadership training is recommended for more women to enhance their innate characteristics- multi-tasking, perseverance, willingness to share power and empower others, etc. In addition, many more merit scholarships should be instituted by government and private organizations for women to pursue postgraduate studies to boost capacity for research & development.

Keywords: Education, gender, women representation, leadership and development

INTRODUCTION

Education in its broadest perspective is the lifelong learning, both formal and informal, which aims at equipping the individual effectively with acceptable skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences that will enable him/her to cope favorably with the problems of the society. It is one of the main keys to economic development and improvements in human welfare. As global economic competition grows deeper, education becomes an important source of competitive advantage, closely linked to economic growth, and a way for countries to attract jobs and investment. In addition, education appears to be one of the key determinants of lifetime earnings. Countries therefore, frequently see raising educational attainment as a way of tackling poverty and deprivation.

In developing countries, education is also linked to a whole batch of indicators of human development. Unfortunately, the potential contribution of women in education is undervalued and underutilized (Adamu, 2012). In Nigeria, there had been several developmental initiatives in the sector since 1960; however, the standard has been degrading instead of getting better (Educational Policy, 2012). In view of the crucial role of women in molding

individuals from birth and throughout human lifecycle, there is no way a country can achieve development without the participation of women in government. It is not just the participation of women in government that is the necessary solution, but having women in decision making positions.

In many countries of the world, the contributions of women were not being recognized until when the United Nations (UN) declared the Decade of Women (1976-1985), making it mandatory on governments to focus on issues of women as an integral component of national development (Jekayinfa, 1999). In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Subsequent conferences on women were held in Copenhagen, Denmark 1980; Nairobi in Kenya 1985 and at the fourth world conference in Beijing in China in 1995, where the UN adopted the Agenda for the empowerment of women by spelling out areas that should receive priority by the year 2000 (United Nations, 1995). The UN set a numerical target of 20 percent female representation in national decision-making bodies as a short-term goal, to be achieved by the year 2000, and 30 percent as a long-term goal to be achieved by 2005 (United Nations, 1995).

Since Nigeria has joined the rest of the world to allow women to participate fully in the society; from going to school to doing formal jobs, she has witnessed a remarkable improvement in educational sector and the workplace (Anugwom, 2009). The Federal Government of Nigeria has also fully embraced some of the resolutions of these conferences and has in the past ten years or so appointed women generally into some decision making positions such as Ministers, Special Advisers, Director Generals, etc.

The purpose of this paper therefore, is to investigate the impact of the role of women particularly the Nigerian women in Education and national development.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted in order to investigate the impact of the role of women in Education with particular reference to Nigeria. The research addresses the gender distribution at various levels of education to determine if there is enough population of women to make the required impact. Information was obtained from Ministry of Education, academic planning unit of various tertiary institutions in Imo State and other secondary sources such as books, articles and reports from the World Wide Web. A quantitative data analysis technique was employed in order to analyze the data and related documents.

WOMEN'S IMPACT IN EDUCATION

Women have made substantial achievements in Education worldwide. The number of women entering into colleges and university education worldwide is increasing. In the United Kingdom, 50% of college and university students are women (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2006). In United States of America, about 52% of college students are women while in the universities, women represent 30% of medical students, 40% of MBA students, 40% of Law students and 15% of Engineering students (Rosener, 1995) and (US Dept of Education, 1995). This same trend was found in the European Union countries, where about 48% of college students are female (Tertiary Education Statistics, 2011). This enrolment trend has not changed till date. It has enriched the pool of female researchers who bring in various perspectives and ethical points of view.

Very long time ago, in Nigeria, teaching was dominated by men. However, in the early 1980s, late payment of teachers' salaries led to frustration among teachers. Consequently, a greater percentage of the male teachers could not cope so they backed out from the system while their female counterparts remained and sustained the teaching profession in primary

and secondary schools. Without the women, the educational system in Nigeria would have collapsed during that period.

From the study, the teaching profession, worldwide at secondary and primary school levels was found to be pre-dominated by women and was seen as a 'suitable' job for women. However, a critical analysis of the statistics, revealed that despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are greatly under-represented in positions of management. For instance, only about 15% of British university vice-chancellors are women, (Women Resource Centre, 2010). At the time of writing this report, there are 4 female Vice-Chancellors, out of about 90 universities in Nigeria (4.44%). While for the polytechnics, there are 3 female rectors out of about 58 (5.17%). , For the four tertiary institutions studied, the gender distribution of lecturers for instance, in 2007-2012, showed that only 21.0% of full-time academic staff were female, compared with 79% of male academics. Most women, for some considerable portion of their working lives, have to balance their work commitments with caring either for children or elderly parents or both (Amelou, 2012). *The research question is whether these numbers of women are enough to make the desired impact.*

In Nigeria and many African countries, the women participation rate at senior management level is still very low in all fields of endeavour. Studies on gender and leadership have revealed a number of barriers to women seeking educational leadership and management positions. This underrepresentation of women in positions of senior management within educational institutions, in particular, continues to be a matter of serious concern. History has it that many occasions where women were given the opportunity, many of them excelled and made dramatic impacts. Some of these will be discussed in the following section.

Impact on Quality and Standard of Education

Women tend to look at issues differently from men, and they provide insights and new ideas that lead to innovation, higher quality and standards (Ezeh and Chukwudebe, 2006). Some time ago in Nigeria, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was introduced to replace individual entrance examination to tertiary institutions. It was a very good concept for optimization, to avoid a candidate getting duplicate admissions while several do not get. Unfortunately, as time progressed, it was observed that some candidates who score very highly in JAMB and gain admission, performed poorly and some could not graduate from the universities. Such ill prepared students became a pain in the neck and threatened university management and lecturers.

It took the courage of a woman, to intervene. Mrs. Chinwe Nora Obaji, as Education Minister showed concern, for quality education and allowed the Post-JAMB Examination screening in universities. The Post-JAMB screening test takes out unqualified candidates, leaving only those students who are well prepared for admission.

Another Education Minister, after Mrs. Obaji, Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili drilled down to actual facilities on ground and the number of students taking the entrance to tertiary institutions. She made very good proposals for improving the quality of education so that graduates from Nigerian universities can compete internationally. One of her recommendations, to convert some polytechnics to degree awarding institutions, created more spaces for the teeming population of youth who want admission to universities.

The current Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayatu Ahmed Rufai is tackling the quality and standard of education from various perspectives. Some of her achievements are in the areas of funding and education delivery. On funding, grants to tertiary institutions have been

increased from thirty billion naira (N30 billion) in 2009 to seventy billion naira (N70 billion) to enhance their carrying capacity. The states and the federal institutions have also witnessed improved access to Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) and Tertiary Education Trust Fund interventions.

On strengthening the institutional management of Education, she has facilitated the collation and publication of Digest of Education Statistics, 2006-2010. Before now, the country had been lampooned by the international education development partners for lack of statistics to guide intervention in the sector. On Teacher Education and Development, the Honorable Minister of Education has facilitated the development of professional standards manual to enhance the effectiveness of teacher education practice. While on welfare, she has flagged-off of a Housing programme for all Teachers Scheme (HATS). Some State governments; Bauchi, Niger, Ondo and Taraba have already donated land for the scheme.

Impact on Leadership and Management Process

Naturally, there are differences between the leadership and management styles of men and women. Research findings of Ezeh and Chukwudebe (2006), show that women adopt democratic and interactive leadership styles in the corporate world. Another research done by Rosener (1990) revealed that women are more likely than men to use “transformational leadership” which involves motivating others by transforming their individual self-interest into the goals of the group. The collaborative leadership style associated with women contrasts with the men’s authoritarian style. The interactive leadership and management styles give opportunity for different perspective/insights, multi-tasking, compassion, attention to detail and team spirit.

The management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to meet international standards has been a challenge since independence in 1960. The first female Vice-Chancellor in Nigeria (1985-1991), Prof. (Mrs) Grace Allele Williams, faced strong opposition at the University of Benin while trying to maintain standards for research and publications (Efedi, 2012). Today, University of Benin is one of the top ranked universities in Nigeria.

Another example is Dr. Omanhe Phillipa Idogho the first female rector of Federal Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State (Nigerian Newsworld, June 10, 2012). She broke the jinx over the conduct of convocations in her institution. Before her intervention, many graduates of the polytechnic for decades had graduated without being offered diploma certificates or statements of result. She changed the way teachers handle students’ examination scripts and ensured that results were released as soon as students complete the examination. She equally tackled the issue of cultism in the institution. She achieved this by given students orientation on the dangers of cultism and sending some student union leaders abroad for leadership and security training.

Many of our tertiary institutions have similar problems and more importantly, candidates seeking admission are not well prepared. This sector needs a well-structured reform. Do we have enough female teachers at various levels to make the required impact? Are the female representations at the management cadre adequate to drive the required reforms? To answers some of these questions, the next section presents statistics on gender distribution at various levels of education in Imo state.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS IN IMO STATE

Primary Schools

The data on the number of male and female teachers during the period, 2006-2011 obtained from Imo State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) is shown in Table 1 and plotted in Figure 1.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Primary School Teachers in Imo State

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Males</i>	<i>Number of Females</i>	<i>Total for Each Year</i>	<i>% of Females</i>	<i>% of Males</i>
2006	2,331	12,586	14,917	84.4	15.6
2007	2,211	12,456	14,667	84.9	15.1
2008	1,805	11,546	13,351	86.5	13.5
2009	1,549	10,822	12,371	87.5	12.5
2010	1,380	10,498	11,878	88.4	11.6
2011	1,261	10,089	11,350	88.9	11.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>10,537</i>	<i>67,997</i>	<i>78,502</i>	<i>86.6</i>	<i>13.4</i>

Source: Primary data from SUBEBs (2006-2012)

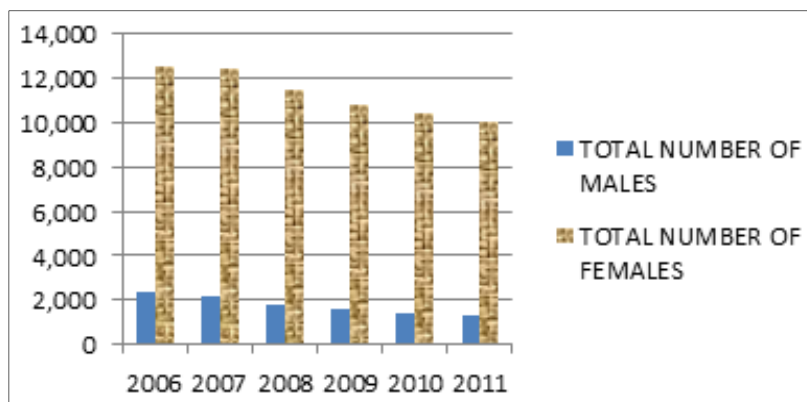


Figure 1. Male/Female teachers in Primary schools in Imo State

From Table 1, it will be seen that there was a steady decrease in the number of female teachers at the primary level, from 12,586 to 10,089, also there was a steady decrease for that of male teachers at this level from 2,331 to 1,261. Although there was a decline in the number in primary level, the SUBEBs survey report (2006-2012) for Imo State showed that there were 67,997 female teachers in primary schools alone, while the number of their male counter-part was 10,537. The plot in Fig 1, brings out clearly the fact that the number of female teachers in the primary schools is much greater than that of their male counterpart by more than 5 times.

Secondary School Education

A similar investigation was conducted and data on the number of male and female teachers obtained from Imo State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs), for secondary schools

for the period, 2005-2012. The gender distribution for teachers is shown in Table 2 and plotted in Fig 2.

Table 2. Secondary Schools Staff Strength In Imo State

<i>Zone</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total No. of Male</i>	<i>Total No. of Female</i>	<i>Year</i>
OKIGWE	684	439			
ORLU	794	610	3,459	3,661	2005-2006
OWERRI	1981	2,612			
OKIGWE	623	381			
ORLU	738	557	2,932	3,072	2006-2007
OWERRI	1,571	2,134			
OKIGWE	385	238			2007-2008
ORLU	396	352	1,877	1,794	
OWERRI	1,096	1,204			
OKIGWE	535	900			
ORLU	584	984	3,057	5,127	2008-2009
OWERRI	1,938	3,243			
OKIGWE					
ORLU			2,119	3,033	2009-2010
OWERRI					
OKIGWE	434	418			
ORLU	542	726	1,909	1,343	2011-2012
OWERRI	933	199			
<i>Total</i>	<i>13,234</i>	<i>14,997</i>	<i>15,352</i>	<i>18,030</i>	

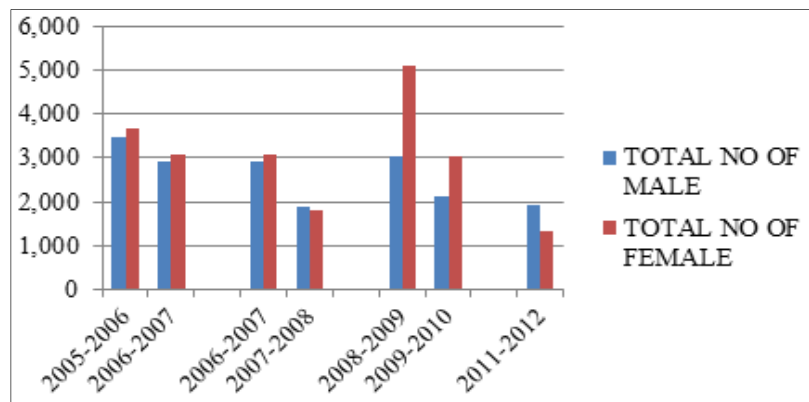


Figure 2. Gender distribution of teachers in secondary schools in Imo State

From Table 2 and Fig 2, it will be seen that there was a steady increase in the number of female teachers at the secondary schools, from 3,661 to 14,369 (392% increase). Also the number of male teachers increased from 3,459 to 11,893 between 2005- 2012, representing an increase of 344% as shown in Table 2. When compared with the Primary school data, the number of female teachers in Secondary schools outnumbers that of their male counterpart.

Women’s Participation in Tertiary Education

There is a wide disparity between males and females in tertiary education. This scenario has not changed much, even with the general increase in enrolment of females in educational institutions in recent times due to national and international policies in this direction. Although, it was not easy to access comprehensive data from the tertiary institutions in Imo state, the gender distribution statistics obtained is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Male/Female Academic Staff in Tertiary Institutions in Imo State (2005-2012)

<i>Institutions</i>	<i>Male Academic Staff</i>	<i>Female Academic Staff</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% of Male</i>	<i>% of Female</i>
Federal Polytechnic Nekede	379	143	522	0.726	0.274
Alvan Ikoku College of Education	234	32	266	0.88	0.12
Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo	556	212	768	0.724	0.276
Federal University Of Technology Owerri	2162	490	2652	0.815	0.185

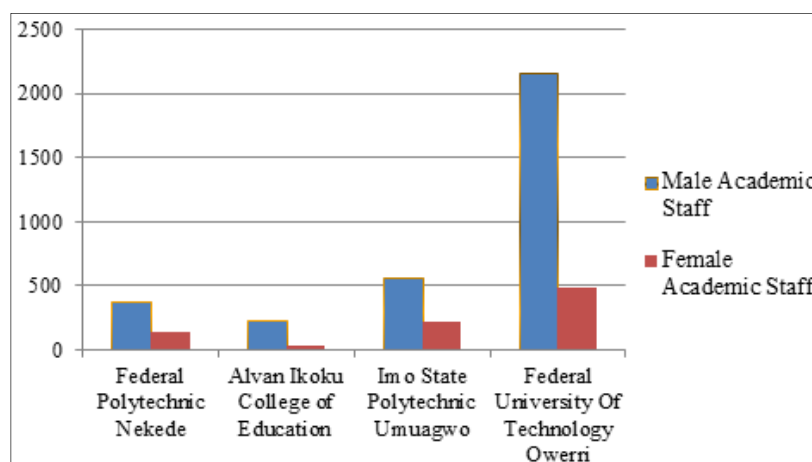


Figure 3. Gender distribution of Academic staff in tertiary institutions in Imo State

DISCUSSION

Women have played crucial roles at all levels of education. Few notable Nigerian women achievers who made appreciable impact had good education. They exhibited courage and passion for reform. From the study it was discovered that at a certain time in Nigeria when primary and secondary education would have collapsed, women stayed as teachers despite the poor remunerations. In other parts of the world too, because of the peculiar circumstances of women in the families, many of them were found teaching at pre-university levels.

The result of this investigation has confirmed that the teaching profession is predominately women at the primary and secondary school levels. For the period of study in Imo state, the trend found, was an increase in the percentage of females in the primary schools and a

reduction in the percentage of males. This is not unconnected with poor salary and environmental condition of the primary schools. However, some state governments have decided to address this challenge. The Rivers state government for instance, is leading other state governments in reforming the primary schools infrastructure to international standard.

For the secondary schools in the state studied, the female teachers were again more than the males. However, despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are still greatly under-represented in positions of management.

In higher education, the survey showed that men represent the majority of academic staff and occupy the most senior academic and managerial positions, whereas, women are consistently under-represented in teaching, research and academic administrative positions of high status. This imbalance needs to be addressed especially since higher education shapes the contemporary world by producing graduates with the requisite human relations, critical thinking and technical skills to participate in national and international decision-making and problem solving. Thus, it is worrisome that women are underrepresented at this level and are yet to form the critical mass to make the required impact.

CONCLUSIONS

Worldwide, it has become accepted that women have crucial roles to play in the development of all sectors of the economy and that they *have the knack to successfully carry out reforms*. Nigeria has realized this, and started given women opportunities to become ministers, chief judges, commissioners, etc. This paper has critically examined the impact of women's role in education. The study affirms the fact that the number of women appointments is still not adequate to make the necessary impact. The process is still ad hoc awaiting appropriate policy or legislation, such as the affirmative action in USA where a certain percentage of some positions is reserved for women.

The investigation revealed that females are under-represented in polytechnics, universities and managerial positions of pre-university, although they constitute the majority in primary and secondary schools. One of the reasons for this lack of women in managerial positions is the barriers they face; informal rules and traditional practices. While some are due to misconceptions that women have taken over, whereas they have only come to complement men's role and fill up the missing link.

Another reason is that, in Nigeria and many African countries, only a small percentage of women have the required training and level of education for management positions, consequently, the critical mass of educated women to make the required impact that will reform the sector and the economy is yet to be realized.

Women play special roles as mothers when a baby is born, throughout the lifecycle of the child, in addition to taking care of the whole extended family. Thus, there is no denying of the fact that *the hand that rocks the cradle determines a nation's development*.

In conclusion, as women represent about one half of the active population in many countries, should they not be involved in management positions on an equal basis? However, we are not advocating for an all-women affair in all sectors of the economy but for a deliberate policy and plan to increase women participation at management positions where women are underutilized and underrepresented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the fact that long term discriminatory practices against women has affected their academic attainment in Nigeria and many African countries, special scholarships for women

should be instituted by government and private organizations at both graduate and postgraduate studies to boost capacity for research & development in order to provide the required numbers of women to make the necessary impact.

A general improvement in the remuneration and conditions of service for all teachers, especially at the primary and secondary school levels has become imperative since the quality of pre-university education has an important role to play. This is in addition to the training of teachers on modern methods of effective education delivery. All state governments should rehabilitate their primary and secondary schools and revitalize inspections and monitoring of schools' operation for improved quality education.

Women academics in science and technology should embark on role model and career talks in secondary schools to attract more young girls to study science and engineering and enlighten them early, on critical requirements.

Finally, more qualified women should be given relevant leadership and management training to enhance their innate characteristics of multi-tasking, perseverance, willingness to share power and empower others. As we commend the federal and some state governments for appointment of women ministers and commissioners, we recommend for more appointments for we are yet to reach that critical mass required to make a sustainable impact.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Adamu A. U. (2012, August). *Educational Reforms in Nigeria*. Retrieved from http://www.kanoonline.com/publications/educational_reform_in_nigeria.htm
- [2]. Amelou B. R. (2012, June). *Women's Education Worldwide: Our Advocacy Role*. Retrieved from https://www.mtholyoke.edu/proj/wew/ABR_Advocacy.pdf
- [3]. Anugwom E. E. (2009). Women, Education and Work in Nigeria. *Educational Research and Review*, 4(4), 127-134.
- [4]. Educational Policy in Nigeria from the Colonial Era to the Post-Independence Period. (2012, June). Retrieved from www.ijse.eu/index.php/ijse/article/viewFile/142/144
- [5]. Efedi O. E. (2012). *Women Education: A Vehicle for Women Effective and Efficient Role Performance in National Development in Nigeria*. Retrieved from http://www.uniben.edu/sites/default/files/user_8/women_education.pdf
- [6]. Ezeh G.N and Chukwudebe G.A. (2006). The Crucial Role of Women Engineers in The National Reforms For Economic Development. *Presented at Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria Conference*.
- [7]. Jekayinfa A. A. (1999). The Role of Nigerian Women in Culture & National Development. *Journal of Educational Theory & Practice*, 5(1&2).
- [8]. Nigerian Newsworld, June 10th 2012. Retrieved from www.nigeriannewsworld.com
- [9]. Rosener, J. B. (1995). *America's Competitive Secret Utilizing Women as a Management Strategy*. Oxford University Press.
- [10]. Women in American Higher Education. (2012, August). Retrieved from <http://www.policy.hu/slantcheva/WomenEducation.html>
- [11]. Women Resource Centre. (2010). *Statistics about Women in the UK*. Retrieved from info@wrc.org.uk
- [12]. US Depart of Education. (1995). *Findings from the Condition of Education 1995*. National Centre for Education Statistics No. 5, The Educational Progress of Women.
- [13]. Equal Opportunities Commission. (2006). Facts about Men and Women in UK. Retrieved from www.eoc-law.org.uk
- [14]. Tertiary education statistics (2011). Retrieved from http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Tertiary_education_statistics