

Persistent Gender Inequality in Nigerian Education

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Abstract

The research reviewed persistent gender-inequality in Nigerian education at all levels, including the effect in turn-out of the Nigerian Youth Service Corps. The introduction of the free Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the nation in 1976 and the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) since 2000 did not revert the situation. Statistics collected from various sources and analysed ascertained the contention of the research. Reasons for this continuous gender inequality in Nigerian education were found to be traditional and cultural. The implication is revealed in poor national development as the contribution of the females is very significant. Recommendations include promulgation of laws by the Federal Government to make parents release their girl-children for education and enforcing 50:50 quota system of admission in all levels of Nigerian educational system.

Persistent Gender Inequality in Nigerian Education

Gender refers to society's division of humanity, based on sex, into two distinctive categories. Gender guides how females and males think about themselves, how they interact with others, and what position they occupy in society as a whole. Thus gender also operates as a dimension of social inequality. This inequality, which has historically favoured males, is no simple matter of biological differences between the two sexes. Females and males do of course differ biologically, but these disparities are complex and in consistent.

Gender roles are attitude and activities that a culture links to each sex. Gender roles are the active expression of gender identity. The first question people usually ask about a new born child in Nigeria is: "Is it a boy or a girl?" Such a question carries a great deal of significance for the child's entire life. In global perspective, the preference for boys is more pronounced in Africa and most Asia countries. Discrimination against females is common in these countries.

Iloegbunam (2006), said one of the ironies of history is the fact that despite the role women play both at home and in the society, they have remained unnoticed and even belittled. This is borne out of the notion that women's function of being homemakers and caring for children is not important. Women therefore are to be seen and not heard. This has grossly affected women enrolment in education. History has revealed discrimination against women in education. A review of the history of education revealed that even among the ancient cities of Athens and Sparta, girls were excluded from the education given to the boys (Clement, 1963). Athens devoted much time to sports and athletics and the boys were trained in gymnastics and various types of sports and not the girls. The Spartans trained their children right from cradle to be strong astute soldiers. An educated man from their own assessment, was a brave soldier who could withstand the winter, cold and dare the enemy with courage and determination and the training for this usually began when the child was five years or below. Eventually all the soldiers then were men. The first high school in Boston in the United State of America was established in 1821 for boys only (Clement, 1963).

In our African society, the education of women did not receive significant attention and this led to the second class status assigned to women in society. Women are relegated to mere agents of domestic engagements at home, with considerable reproductive roles. This apathy arising from gender inequality has also affected education in Nigeria. As a result the males have dominated Nigerian schools from the primary to tertiary level.

The aim of this research is to statistically ascertain gender inequality in Nigerian education especially as it affects school enrolment. There is a distribution of educational opportunities in Nigeria in favour of the male sex. The issue of social justice and equity can only be attained when both sexes are given equal opportunities in respect to educational training. The National population census figures shows that Nigeria as a country have a sex composition that is almost fifty fifty for males and females, but the education pendulum swings to the male gender.

The objective of this paper therefore is to seek answers to questions such as:- Is there gender inequality in education in Nigeria using school enrolment as a measure? What are the causes of gender inequality in education? What are the implications of such gender inequalities? How can the situation be normalized?

Statement of the Problem

There is still much gender inequality in Nigerian Education in spite of all steps taken by the Federal Government to give equal gender opportunity to education such as the provision of the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and today, the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The female gender is still lacking behind in education and this has much implication in the social-economic status of the females in the nation. If drastic measures are not taken, tomorrow education in Nigeria may be all male affairs as the females dominate the markets, the farms and the homes to make more babies and increase poverty in the land.

Research Questions

The research questions to be answered by the research are as follows:-

- (1) Are there still gender inequalities in Nigerian education today?
- (2) What are the causes of gender inequality in Nigerian education?
- (3) What are the implications of such gender inequalities?
- (4) What further steps could be taken to normalize this abnormally in Nigerian Educational System?

Methodology

Method used in the study was purely analytical. Statistical data of school enrolment in the nation were obtained from various sources and were analysed to show enrolment at the three level of educational system in the nation. Enrolment of Youth Service Corps Development was also used as youth service is the outcome of tertiary level gender products.

Census in Nigeria covering the period under study was in 1991 and 2006. In 1991, the ratio was males 50.04% and females 49.96%. In 2006, the ratio was males 51.21% and females 48.79% (Nigerian Census Gender Population, www.nigerianpolity.blogspot.com/2007/01).

Data Analysis

Gender Inequality in Education

Table 1 National Summary of Primary School Statistics (1996-2005)

Year	Total Enrolment	Male Enrolment	%	Female Enrolment	%	Remarks
1996	15,496,074	8,935,865	57.66	6,560,209	42.33	More male
1997	17,397,553	9,837,394	56.54	7,560,159	43.45	More male
1998	16,045,567	9,232,885	57.54	6,812,682	42.45	More male
1999	17,907,010	10,058,434	56.17	7,848,576	43.82	More male
2000	19,158,439	10,745,128	56.08	8,413,311	43.91	More male
2001	19,263,534	10,805,722	56.09	8,457,812	43.90	More male
2002	19,861,682	11,070,610	55.73	8,791,072	44.26	More male
2003	25,772,044	14,433,764	56.00	11,338,280	43.99	More male
2004	20,037,480	11,141,614	55.60	8,895,866	44.39	More male
2005	20,951,818	11,712,479	55.90	9,239,339	44.09	More male
Total	191,891,201	107,973,895	56.26	83,917,306	43.73	More male

Sources: Universal Basic Education Commission, Abuja

National Bureau of Statistics (social statistics in Nigeria (2005))

National Bureau of Statistics (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2006)

Table 1 above revealed that there are more male enrolment at the basic level of education with a total of 107,973,895 (56.26%) while that of the female was 83,917,306 (43.73%). These data revealed that there is a gender inequality in education right from the primary level.

Table 2 National Summary of Secondary School Statistics (1996-2005)

Year	Total Enrolment	Male Enrolment	%	Female Enrolment	%	Remarks
1996	4,201,333	2,229,529	54.63	1,971,804	46.93	More male
1997	3,921,664	2,083,002	53.11	1,838,662	46.88	More male
1998	4,003,915	2,235,392	55.83	1,768,523	44.16	More male
1999	3,844,585	2,406,608	53.23	1,797,977	46.76	More male
2000	4,104,345	2,262,130	55.11	1,842,215	44.88	More male
2001	5,533,384	3,246,566	58.67	2,286,818	41.32	More male
2002	6,296,174	3,717,864	59.04	2,578,310	40.95	More male
2003	7,171,304	4,063,775	56.66	3,107,829	43.33	More male
2004	5,388,734	3,077,911	57.11	2,310,823	42.88	More male
2005	5,422,611	3,079,832	56.79	2,342,779	43.20	More male
Total	49,888,049	28,042,309	56.21	21,845,746	43.78	More male

Sources: Universal Basic Education Commission, Abuja

National Bureau of Statistics (social statistics in Nigeria (2005))

National Bureau of Statistics (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2006)

The data in table 2 indicated that there are more male students in secondary schools in Nigeria, with a total number of 28,042,309 male students (56.21%) as against that of female students of 21,345,746 (43.78%) under the ten years period of investigation.

Table 3 National Summary of Primary Schools of some selected LGAs and States in Nigeria (1996)

S/N	STATE	NO OF LGA's	Total No of schools	Total Male Enrolment	Total Female Enrolment	Remarks
1	Abuja	4	36	76,546	36,444	More males

2	Delta	18	301	450,786	236,326	More males
3	Edo	14	246	293,919	144,436	More males
4	Enugu	19	180	270,189	144,436	More males
5	Kaduna	18	178	532,137	223,749	More males
6	Kogi	16	238	437,713	199,446	More males
7	Lagos	15	299	655,679	329,247	More males
8	Rivers	24	320	511,704	253,922	More males
9	Sokoto	29	46	103,581	51,592	More males
10	Zamfara	11	32	103,581	21,977	More males

Sources: Federal Ministry of Education/Universal Basic Education Commission Abuja. National Bureau of Statistics (Annual Abstract of Statistics 2006).

Table 3 shows statistics of primary enrolment for some selected states and local government areas in Nigeria. The data showed that there are more male pupils than female pupils. This table confirms the information in table 1.

Table 4 National Youth Service Corps

Deployment of Members by Sex (1996-2005)

Year	Total	Male	%	Female	%	Remarks
1996	48,222	30,426	63.09	17,796	36.90	More males
1997	72,235	46,074	63.78	26,161	36.21	More males
1998	89,660	55,881	62.32	33,779	37.67	More males
1999	131,458	72,752	55.34	58,706	44.65	More males
2000	146,358	85,170	58.19	61,188	41.80	More males
2001	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2002	143,383	81,325	56.71	62,058	43.28	More males
2003	96,178	53,037	55.14	43,141	44.85	More males

2004	112,286	59,845	50.12	53,441	46.70	More males
2005	113,326	56,805	50.12	56,521	44.09	More males
Total	954, 106	41,315	56.26	412,791	39.56	More males

Sources: National youth service corps, Abuja as cited in National Bureau of statistics (Annual Abstract of State 2006).

N/A = Not Available

From the available data in table 4, it was revealed that there were more male youth Corp Members than female Corp Members. They were a total of 541, 315 (56.79%) for males as against female total of 412, 791 (43.20%). This result further shows a case of gender inequality in education in Nigeria.

Table 5: Enrolment by Institution and Sex (undergraduates)

Institution	2000/2001		2001/2002		2004/2005		
	male	female	male	female	male	female	
University of Ibadan (Western Nigeria)	13,415	9,053	12,594	8,499	12,070	6,887	More males
University of Nigeria Nsukka (Eastern Nigeria)	16, 178	9,821	17,976	16,369	16,593	19,596	More female
University of Benin (Southern Nigeria)	13,059	9,850	14,458	11,047	23,846	18,258	More males
University of Abuja (Northern Nigeria)	1,606	1,345	1,785	1,495	4,835	4,386	More males
Total	44,258	30,069	46,398	36,758	57,344	49,127	More males

Source: National Universities Commission.

The result in table 5 showed male and female enrolment for the period of 2000 - 2005 sessions from four randomly selected universities, each representing a geographical region. There are more male students than female, which also indicates a case of gender inequality in education at the university level for the period under investigation.

Table 6: Graduate Turn out of Master's Degree in the Nation

Year	Total	Male	%	Female	%	Remarks
2001	10,820	7,714	71.29	3,106	28.71	More males
2002	15,151	10,994	72.56	4,157	27.43	More males
2003	14,056	10,748	76.46	3,308	23.53	More males
2004	12,492	8,529	68.27	3,963	31.72	More males
2005	8,385	6,352	75.75	2,033	24.24	More males
Total	60,904	44,337	72.79	16,567	27.20	More males

Source: National Universities Commission

The data in table 6 showed more male masters' degree holders than the females. The males were 44,337 which are 72.79% as against a total of 60,904 with a percentage of 27.20 for females.

This result has also showed that there is gender inequality in education at the masters' level in Nigerian education.

Table 7: Graduate Turn-out of Doctorate degree in the Nation

Year	Total	Male	%	Female	%	Remarks
2001	690	543	78.70	147	2.30	More males
2002	721	578	80.17	143	19.83	More males
2003	752	553	73.54	217	147	More males
2004	794	577	72.67	217	27.32	More males
2005	428	336	78.50	92	21.50	More males
Total	3,385	2,587	6,401	798	23.57	More males

Source: National Universities Commission

The data in table 7 revealed that there are 2,587 male doctorate graduates representing 76.43% as against 798 female Doctorate graduates representing 23.57%. The result of the analysis indicates that there are more males with Ph.D. in Nigeria which further ascertain the fact that there is gender inequality in education in Nigeria.

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Factors Responsible for Gender Inequality in Education

Based on the available statistical data for primary, secondary and university enrolment we discovered higher percentage of male's enrolment at the different levels of education in Nigeria. There seems to be one underlying causative factor. It is the general preference by parents of male children to females. This higher level of preference is based on the traditional practice that male children will succeed their fathers and sustain their family. Also considering the limited resources of families such families prefer to lavish such meagre resources on their male children instead on female children that will become wives to other men and will no longer bear their family names.

A major factor is the issue of male dominance in access to educational opportunities. The opportunity cost of foregoing school for female children is very high due to the male roles and society preference for male children.

According to Oganwu (1996), the Nigerian women and their counterparts in other African countries have been debased and dishonoured by the thought that every woman is supposed to consider motherhood as the principal purpose of her existence. She is expected to produce children, cook, mend and wash clothes and take care of men and be subordinate to male authority.

In some communities the female children are not sent to school like their male counterparts due to some cultural practices. Most Nigerian parents erroneously believe that sending girls to school may interfere with their marriage, which they consider to constitute the primary mission of a female child (Nwideeduh, 1994).

However, for gender inequality to be reduced, which has always been in favour of the male gender, Olarenwaju (2005), observed that education has been recognized to be the only viable instrument for correcting any inequality in any society. Also male child education was given preference because of the

patrilineal system, which confers rights of inheritance on the male child only (Nwideeduh, 1994; Maduabum, 1992, and Nwana, 1987).

The education for most female children stops at the primary and secondary school levels due to the issue of male roles, cultural and social believes.

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Implications of Gender Inequality in Education in the Nation

The data analyzed above in Tables 1 - 7 have shown cases of gender inequality in education from primary to the tertiary level in favour of male gender. This disparity has implications for educational and national development. The impact of gender inequality in education depends on the size of the differential and the disadvantaged sex involved at any level of education, which according to our results is mainly the female gender. Thus society will be richer in high level manpower the more women have access to education, because educating a female (a girl child) is educating the nation. Nations where women are denied access to education will continue to wallow in poverty and poor health. It takes education to imbibe health-culture and good sanitization. These illiterate mothers will continue to perpetuate their ignoramus to their children both males and females.

Iloegbunsim (2006), said education, is a weapon for social development, equity and justice. Providing women with equal opportunity for education would foster the repositioning of women socially, economically and even politically since women are mothers of tomorrow's nation.

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Recommendations

In order to eliminate the issue of gender inequality in education in Nigeria, the following conscious efforts should be made:

- All cultural and traditional practices, which may tend to enhance gender inequality in education should be discouraged at all levels of education.
- Government (federal, state and local) should give financial assistance through scholarships or bursaries to female students.

- Educate the parents and the general public so as to bring about a change in attitude towards women education. The non-governmental bodies (NGO) should be assigned to do this by the government.
- The governments should promulgate laws against early marriage that hinder the females to read and pursue education.
- Also laws should be promulgated against using the females to be hawkers in the street where many are exposed to danger of early sex that lead to unwanted pregnancies that force them out of school.
- Finally, let there be a rule on quota system of 50:50 in admission of males and females to all institutions of learning from primary to tertiary level. That means ratio of admission should be 50 females to 50 males in all levels.

Conclusion

This research has shown that there is persistence of gender inequality in Nigeria at all levels of education. The reasons for this ugly situation have been traced to be historical, cultural, traditional and the patriarchal structure of the society. Education of the girl child is one of the first steps in a process of enabling her to take control over her own life, participate on an equal basis in the society and freeing herself from economic exploitation and patriarchal oppression.

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