

Female Education through Technology as Panacea for Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

By

¹Tafida, Amina G.; ²Mogbo, Irene N. & ³Gana, Celina S.

¹Communication Education Department; ^{2&3}Science Education Department, Federal University of Technology, Minna

¹08030408982; ²08035876475; ³08051143079

¹EMAIL: tafidagogo@yahoo.com; ²rene_mogbo@yahoo.com; ³gana.celina@futminna.edu.ng

Abstract

Education is one of the most important means of empowering people with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in any developmental process. Though education is important for everyone, it is more significant for girls and women as it is an entry point to other opportunities and a means to reduce poverty. Education of the female folk helps in the education of the entire society irrespective of sex, which is a vital tool in poverty eradication. With education, girls and women are able to make giant strides in areas which are necessary for poverty alleviation such as; agriculture, health, business, politics, information acquisition and dissemination, socialization, religious affairs, and everything necessary for the wellbeing of an individual and his/her community. This paper focuses on the fact that while measures taken by successive governments such as NAPEP, SURE-P, Micro-Finance Bank have not yielded the desired result as far as poverty eradication is concerned, the very simple commitment the society needs in this direction is mass education of the female folk using technological tools such as mobile phones, computer, the internet, multimedia and hypermedia. The paper highlights areas such as development of business avenues, character training, mass education, enlightenment, good health, among others, which are needed in order to reduce or even wipe out poverty. Recommendations offered include, making quality education accessible to girls and women in every nook and corner of the country, utilizing the use of technological tools in the business of education, sensitizing parents on the role of female education, establishing more female schools, providing enabling environment necessary for utilizing technological tools in education and employing more female teachers in schools and to serve in key positions in the society.

Introduction

Education is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training or, and research (Swift, 2006). Berg (2012) sees education as a process of imparting or gaining knowledge, judgement and a level of intellectual maturity. He went further that the importance of education lays in future job prospects, qualitative and creativity. An educated person is one that perceives accurately, thinks clearly, and acts effectively on self and others in selected goals.

Education is a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the universal declaration on human rights and the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. Quality education is fundamental to the development of knowledge in all nations and spheres. Iheonunekwu (2003), states that Education remains the only key that unlocks development and that the quality of education an individual receives determines his/her usefulness to him/her and the society. Education is a weapon for eradicating unemployment and ignorance. Education does not only benefit the person learning, but also the community in which he/she lives. It contributes to the economic stability of any country by increasing the income of the poor, as well as promotes civil and international peace. Nyirenda (2013) opines that it through education that individuals realise their potential to contribute to production, wealth creation, and execution of various roles that make for national development. It is also through education that they are able to benefit from the distribution of wealth in the economy, have a political voice and access social goods and services to enhance their living standards.

Female education implies the provision of education and its facilities to both girls and women, regardless of religion, culture, geographical or socio-cultural backgrounds. In fact, education helps women to excel along the aforementioned areas. Historically, female education was not given serious consideration due to

the adage that “women education ends in kitchen”. Women were to stay at home to look after the children and other domestic affairs. Nevertheless, even if women are to stay at home to take charge of domestic affairs, they need education to enable them execute these affairs properly. Education empowers, transforms, and allows them to break the traditional cycle of exclusion that keeps them at home redundantly. Women deserves education more than any other specie; an appreciable level of education that would enable them to carter for themselves, their families and for societal development. This paper is not a campaign for the education of the female folk for “what a man can do a woman can do it better” adage, but for female education that would free women from the shackles of poverty and economic dependence as well as enable them to bring-up God- fearing and self-reliant generations. Women are supposed to be at the priority list of any educational plan at every level. Levinson (1986) observes that the rapid socio-economic development of a nation depends on the calibre of women and their education in that country. Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong education, values, attitudes, competence and skills. Khoo (2010) opines that with the education, if women have the chance to work and earn full salary as men, their families would flourish; and when families flourish, communities and nations do as well. However, it is sad that due to ignorance many women are still denied access to education. This happens in many places of the world. For instance, in Nigeria, women constitute about half of the total population and majority of them are in rural areas, where education is not a priority. Poverty in Nigeria, according to Aregbesola (2013), has peculiar characteristics unlike what obtains in other climates. In Nigeria she opines, there is what can aptly be described as feminisation of poverty, the poverty in Nigeria has more than 70% of the women living below poverty line. This condition has predisposed women to economic hardship, social marginalisation, untimely death, violence and diseases among others.

In Pakistan only less than one-third of the women are literate while in Nepal women who can read make up just one quarter of the population (Scully, 2006). Herz and Sperling (2004) add that of the 104 million out-of-school children, ages 6-11, 60 million are girls. The situation is particularly acute in sub-Sahara Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East where the majority of out-of-school children are concentrated and where completion of even a basic education by girls' lags behind that of boys. The World Development on gender equality and development (2012) drew attention to the fact that there are still 31 million girls that are out of school globally. Denial of the right to education, according to Tomasevski (2005) reported in Right of Education Project (2008), lead to exclusion from labour market and marginalization of the informal sector or unpaid work. This perpetuates and increases women's poverty. Kevane (2004) comments that women continue to face unequal educational opportunities, less inheritance and ownership of assets, discrimination in employment and occupations, violence at home and in public places. These conditions result in discriminating welfare and reduced capacity to fulfil life aspirations, which summarily results in poverty.

Poverty according to Nwankwo (2011) is relatively based on age, place, and time. For instance, a person described as rich in terms of his material resources may at another age, place, or time be described as an extremely poor person. For instance, a man regarded as being rich in a village may be considered poor in an urban city. Poverty is also multidimensional and has complex causes. Not only does the poor have little money, few possessions, they are also often deprived of basic needs such as food, education, health and social services. They also lack access to a source of income earning opportunities, and to political visibility and influence, which reinforces their social and economic vulnerability. Franco (2012) observes that when “poverty consumes you, it takes you to some of the darkest places in your mind; it affects your health and wellbeing and the world around you seems so dark and you feel as though there is no light at the end of the tunnel”. Poverty has not only compromised the lives of countless number of children but also jeopardised the future of the very societies they live in. According to the UNDP (2013), six of the ten world's poorest people are women who work tirelessly for their families. The most outstanding causes of poverty, especially in developing nations are unequal share of income and illiteracy.

Nwankwo (2011) emphasized that some causes of poverty in developing nations include the problem of income distribution resulting from inequality of income because some individuals earn very high income by virtue of their high educational and professional attainment and specializations, the size of their inheritance and talents while others earn lower or none at all. According to Sanusi (2013), Nigeria's immense wealth is a contradiction of the poverty level, because the country has no business in being one of the poorest countries. He added that Nigeria was one of the 80 richest countries in the 70s but now one of

the 25 poorest countries in the world. He attributed the continuous poverty in the country to bad governance and its attendant misplaced priorities, corruption and huge debt burden. Others are non-competitiveness of Nigeria goods in the international markets, few economic opportunities, conflict and violence, high rate of population growth, low productivity, and sub-optimal human capital. He emphasized that lack of proper education could lead to poverty adding that households where the head had no education were poorer than where the head had a secondary education. Globally however, most people classified as poor are illiterates because education is a weapon for survival. Therefore, the only way out of poverty is through a 'great education' and in particular, the female education.

Female Education and Poverty Alleviation

Going by the recent NTA News of 10th and 18th September, 2013, Nigeria still has about 45 million illiterate adults and 10.5 million out of school children. It is therefore glaring that a large population of Nigerians, including female are not educated. This makes it difficult to eradicate poverty despite the measures (such as NAPEP, SURE-P) put in place by both governments and the external bodies. Female education can perform wonders as far as poverty alleviation or even eradication is concerned. To educate women is the surest way of reducing world's poverty because an uneducated woman would transfer to her children the same doomed life. According to President Obama of United States of America in Koppell (2013), if a country is educating her girls, if women have equal rights that country is going to move forward. Kane (2013) also opines that if developing countries improve their economies but maintain current rates of population growth, the consequence for increased environmental degradation will be enormous. Since women usually manage food, water, fuel, intensive agriculture and birth spacing, a woman with at least six years of education will be a critical factor in population control, farm production, livelihood diversity, resource conservation and use of effective technologies. Another benefit, according to Kane (2013) is good governance. Girl's education leads to a greater political participation of women, and research shows that governments are less corrupt when women are more active in politics or the labour force.

An educated woman is well-mannered. She can offer support to her spouse by sharing both formal and domestic duties with him. Instances like the payment of children's school fees, payment for accommodation, assistance in the area of feeding and medical bills of the husband, herself, and the children can be borne by her, particularly if the husband is late or is the irresponsible type. The overall development of the home and the entire community depend on the joint efforts of, not only the man but also the woman.

MacArthur Foundation (2013) finds that 65 low and middle-income countries lose approximately 92 billion pounds per year by failing to educate girls to the same standard as boys and conclude that education for girls is a vital tool in the battle against poverty. UNICEF (1991) also finds that there can be no significant or sustainable transformation in societies and no significant reduction in poverty until girls receive the quality basic education they need to take their rightful places as partners in development. It considers lack of education as a major cause of poverty and vice-versa. Girl's education can bring out enormous economic benefits, including increased family incomes; greater workforce participation; a larger better-prepared workforce, greater participation of women, and their unique contributions in development as well as greater participation of women in political and economic decisions. With education, women can engage in income generation activities in order to reduce poverty. Business transactions at small, medium and large scales are better done if one is educated. Nyerere (2001) observes that education is the social institution that reaches the largest segment of the population with the goal of guiding it through systematic learning process. Instances such as obtaining vital information to boost business and other means of survival could be obtained from technologies such as radio, internet, television etc. Though most parents cannot afford internet-enabled computers for their female children, a large number of them own mobile phones with internet facilities. This technological tool is vital and should be exploited by the teacher to ensure increased access to multimedia and hypermedia application for e-learning among students. The benefit of using multimedia and hypermedia applications in learning enhances functional education delivery among which according to Borsook and Higginbotham (1992) offers the students greater control over the instructional environment. It also provides a level playing field among students to vary their cognitive abilities as well as collaborative learning. Aside of using Mobile phone in education it is according to Tafida (2011) a poverty alleviation tool whose use is maximized and perfected if the user attains some levels of formal education. Ogakwu (2012) also opines that female education creates intergenerational education which is a significant variable affecting children

educational attainment and opportunities. In most cases, a mother with even a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school, since she has benefitted from it herself. It has been observed that the human's potential future brain development and wiring called synapses for intelligence, sense of self-trust and motivation for learning is developed during childhood years in which the mother plays a crucial role in modelling. It is obvious that without an intelligent 'mothering' or educated mother, the result can be lower intelligent quotient (IQ), poor mathematical skills, health and even behavioural problems for the child. Many illiterate or under-educated parents; particularly, women are less likely to see to it that their children get the education they need. This contributes to factors that help perpetuate the cycle of poverty such as child labour, low wages, and job insecurity.

With female education, the adage that "health is wealth" works perfectly for it allows infants to begin life in good health, to be nurtured in a caring environment that enhances the physical, emotional and intellectual capacities that they must have to learn and grow. Ogakwu (2012) opines that educated females are more likely to seek medical care and ensure that their children are immunized and have the knowledge of the nutritional requirements of their children. This helps to lower infant and child mortality rates as well as give them the peace of mind to concentrate on their means of livelihood. Britain and Elliot opine that every year, almost twelve million children under the age of five needlessly die of infectious diseases associated with poverty. However, each additional year spent by their mother's in primary schools lowers the risk of premature child deaths by about 8%. For instance, in Pakistan, an extra year of school for 1000 girls was said to prevent 60 infant deaths. Furthermore, at pregnancy, educated women are aware of the necessary pre and postnatal cares which make them healthy before and after delivery. With education girls will learn about their sexual health, their rights and receive an education relevant to their growing needs as adolescent girls. They can protect themselves against the HIV/AIDS scourge and even help in reducing its spread among members of the society. This helps to increase women's labour force, participation rates in agricultural and environmental practices and earnings resulting in higher Gross National Product. In Nigeria, and indeed Africa, women are the backbone of Agriculture which is the mainstay of the economies. They are also the centre of family life and custodians of cultural and fundamental values of the society. With women as farmers in Africa, education offers a chance to develop more efficient farming practices, improve output and raise awareness of the ecological needs of the land. Moreover, interaction of school education with the economic activities of a community is facilitated if women are educated. For instance, in a carpet weaving, cloth weaving, blacksmithing communities, school lessons could cover various aspects of these activities. In this way, school education would help them to improve the traditional trades of the community, alongside other curricular contents. It would also ensure their future employment possibilities and contribute to the economic wellbeing of the whole community and by extension, the whole country. Wealth creation is an essential aspect of education programmes intended to contribute to poverty eradication.

Moreover, it's only education that can equip girls with the confidence to make the most of their abilities; cultivate the ability to use language properly and convincingly; know their rights and have the confidence to claim it; provide forum for changing attitudes about violence while promoting equality; and help younger women on a path to economic empowerment to better protect themselves from gender-based violence.

Conclusion

For women to achieve economic empowerment which is consequent to poverty alleviation, agents of informal and formal education and the foundation of even the formal education is established at home through what the mother provides. An educated woman provides proper atmosphere for study at home to enrich the learning experiences of her children. Educational empowerment enables women to acquire knowledge and skills and the inclusion of e-learning and mobile learning enables anywhere and anytime learning by female learners. This will enable them to take up jobs in any organisation to earn a living, send her children to school to facilitate the realisation of the objectives of Universal Basic Education establish private schools and serve as school proprietors so as to encourage the education of more girls and contribute meaningfully to the country's economic development and consequently, poverty eradication.

Recommendations

In view of the importance attached to female education, especially in alleviating poverty, the following recommendations are necessary.

1. Enrolment and improvement of retention rates of girls should be improved by allocating appropriate budgetary resources and by enlisting the support of communities and parents through campaigns, rallies and flexible school schedules, incentives, scholarships, access programmes for out-of-school girls and other measures.
2. Education is a right for every child irrespective of sex, government at all level should ensure that every child is educated. Promoting the education of women, even after marriage should be facilitated by the government.
3. The educational system should be geared towards eradicating poverty by giving special consideration to the issue of poverty in the planning of educational services.
4. Women teachers should be employed to serve as role model for girls and increase parents' confidence in girl child education.
5. More girl schools should be established in rural communities.
6. There should be provision of enabling environment necessary for utilizing technological tools such as mobile, computer, etc., in the business of education.
7. Schools should not be alienated from the needs of the local communities. Girls who have not acquired the education should be encouraged to serve in their communities and contribute to its progress.
8. The quality of educational delivery to enhance girls' participation and improve learning outcomes, retention, and achievement by providing in-service training for teachers, administrators and inspectors and by evaluating the curriculum for gender sensitivity should be improved.
9. A supportive environment that helps girls to enrol in school and stay to complete their education to an appreciable level should be provided.

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