

**FUNCTIONAL WOMEN EDUCATION: THE
CHALLENGES OF THE NEXT MILLENNIUM**

A PAPER PRESENTED BY

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Abstract

Nothing meaningful can be built and sustained unless the builders are properly equipped for the desired project. For Nigerian society to grow and progress technologically, the citizens will have to be fully trained to bring about the anticipated development. Hence, the need for the type of education which places heavy emphasis on the development of the mind and rational thinking, the acquisition of viable skills, the development of science and technology, the moral values and any field that enhances self-reliance. This paper examines the need for functional women Education in the next millennium. The general attitudes of the society to women education the main hindrances to functional women education as well as the various ways by which functional education can be realized are discussed.

Introduction

The training and instruction of the young for business of life has been one of the major concerns of mankind. In the pre-colonial Nigeria, the young ones were educated through imitation, observation, instruction and the apprenticeship programmes. Both boys and girls were thoroughly equipped with the kind of education that made them functional members of the society.

Some of the problems that Nigerian society is battling with today such as perpetual dependence on parents for sustenance as a result of unemployment and retrenchments were not rampant in the pre-colonial days. Because every child was adequately exposed to the skills that they needed to function well in the society. Functionality was the watchword in those days. Consequently children became independent of their parents and were able to see to the growth of the community left behind by their parents (Fafunwa 1984:16).

The colonial education that came in later did not promote this functionality that permeated the traditional setting instead, literary or bookish education that made the recipients of education good only for white-collar jobs and other menial jobs became the order of the day (Adeyinka, 1971)

The skilled -oriented subjects were de-emphasized. In fact, women education at this time was tailored towards the roles awaiting them at the home front. The ideology of the

missionaries and the colonial government on women education agreed with the educational views of J. J Rousseau who postulated that women education should be geared towards motherhood and wifehood.

Though the colonial government later became a bit liberal to women education, curriculum of early female secondary school were ordinary subjects like English Grammar, English analysis, English composition, dictation, French, Music, elementary science, scriptures and needle work. Needle work was intensified because it would help graduates to perform well in their homes. (Taiwo 1980:18)

Moreover, skill oriented subjects that would have allowed for functionality and the development of the society were not encouraged either for the boys or the girls simply because the post which Nigerians were motivated to occupy were such that required the acquisition of literary education.

Hence, the education of women before 1960 was nothing but literary. Vocational education and the sciences were not seriously pursued by women. Anything that would eliminate the burden of poverty and hardship was not readily available to the recipients of western education.

Women as well as men at this period also saw vocational education as nothing. Agriculture and Technical education were looked down upon and equated with the work of rural farmers and the roads-side mechanics. Close to 1960, Nigerian began to see the need for vocational as well as science oriented subject as means towards the technological advancement being experienced by the developed countries.

The New National Policy on education pointed out the need for functionality in education. Education is seen as the main tool needed for the realization of Nigerian National goals.

Hence, the school curriculum emphasizes the need to expose all recipients of education to every segment of education. The literary oriented subjects should no longer be the main focus. Learners are to study both the Arts, the science and the vocational subjects needed for them to fit in to the society and for the realization of individual as well as the societal goals.

The essence of education today is to produce individuals that possess the needed skills, and abilities that will lead to the emancipation of Nigerian society.

Definition of Term

The Concept of Education

The national policy on education (1981) defines education as that process that helps to develop the whole man physically mentally, morally, politically, social and technologically to enable him function in any environment in which he may find himself. Hence, an education woman is a literate person who possesses the ability to lift the society to a greater height in all ramifications. Education is the means through which an individual is equipped through exposure to relevant knowledge that he/ she needs to live comfortably and contribute meaningfully towards the development of the society where he/she lives.

Women Education: Mivaniyi (1974) defines women education as that education received by women which would make them become aware of themselves and their capacity to exploit their environment.

Women education refer to the socialization and the training of the sex which bears offspring, that is, the female through schooling gains greater self actualization. In other words, women education is the process of preparing the females for life.

The Concepts of Functional Education

Functional education is the education which is flexible enough to allow graudands acquire skills that could be used now or in the future. A functional educated person should be able to make use of the knowledge acquired during the process of his/her education.

Functional education is a diversified and practical oriented type as of education such that will eliminate poverty and hardship that people are subjected to in the society. Every form of education whether for formal is expected to be geared towards this goals.

One of the five cardinal goals of Nigerian Education is to ensure self reliance through education. Individual are expected to be equipped with enough skills for self sustenance and preservation.

Necessity for Functional Women Education

The acquisition of functional education has been identified as one of the major means by which an individual attain self actualization, self-improvement and the means

by which he/she can contribute his/her quota towards the development of the society where he finds himself.

Pointing out the necessity for functional women education, Ellsworth (1979) stressed that though women would always be responsible to their homes, they form the bulk of individuals that would serve the humanity. Hence, they are needed to deliver their homes as well as the nation from its present predicaments.

In an opening address delivered on the occasion of Women Education Seminar market square rally, Ilorin, Abdulahi (1987) asserted that a developing country like Nigerian with more than 50 percent female populations cannot afford to leave half of its human resources underdeveloped if it is to take its rightful place in the comity of nations.

Indeed, an educated woman is not only an asset to her family but to the entire nation she contributes to the improvement of family economy by making financial contribution to the family expenses and the first as well as the best teacher her children can have.

Functional education makes a woman more competent in solving social problems relating to poverty, unemployment, rising population and inflation. Availability of job oriented subjects will go a long way in alleviating the perennial family as well as societal problem.

Stressing the need for functional women education, Olaiya (1988) stated that "the result of appropriate training for women are self reliance, self-confidence, increased productivity, greater effectiveness, qualification for better jobs, moral boosting etc". For women as a special group, functional education gives them a better chance to control their lives, to earn money, to be better mothers who will not have to depend entirely on her husband for the up-keep of her home and to have improved relationship with their spouses. The regular supports being given to the spouses pave the way for the desired cordial relationship.

Functional women education will deliver innumerable benefits for women and the nation. For instance, national unity, social integration, skilled work force, greater

economic development and under participation in politics will be promote. (Young man, 1991).

Perpetual dependence on spouses and settlement for menial white-collar-jobs will be reduced to the bearest minimum level through functional, job oriented, education. This is because functional education prepares person for employment in recognized occupations.

Hinderances to Functional Women Education

The New National Policy on Education (1981) has laid the foundation for functional women education in Nigerian. Efforts have been made to review and wider school curriculum so as to produce skilled men and women that will aid the desired technological growth of the nation as well as individuals self actualization.

However, as Alele Williams (1986) rightly said, whether woman utilize the available educational facilities depends largely on various social, cultural, economic and other factors which make parents with hold their daughters from school.

The National policy on education (1981) specifically stated that "equal educational opportunity would be made available as much as possible for all citizens of the nation of all levels of education. Yet, the cost of education has consistently prevented some parents from sending their children to school. The meogre family income will rather be spent on male children who are usually regard as the family progenitor.

In some part of Nigeria, early marriage is still impeding successful women education. According to Aiele Williams (1986) "The more attractive the girls are, the more likely they are to attract the eyes, of the chief or a wealthy personality in the community and marry young (P. 24).

Another factor that inhibits the acquisition of functional education in schools is the problem of premature pregnancy leading to drop-out girls from school.

The muslim purdad system has also been identified as a major impediment to the progress of women education in Nigeria. This is a system whereby married girls are confined to their homes in a state of almost total isolation not only from the main steams of formal education

but also from any significant participation in the social and economic life of their community. (Ikime, 1980: 592).

Discriminatory practices in the labour market also inhibit the acquisition of functional education by women. These practices confine women to low-status and low-paying jobs. Lack of highly skilled teachers in the occupational oriented subjects like Home economics, science, Business education, introductory technology, commerce, accounting, Agriculture, etc. who are to produce efficient and skilled workers is a major hinderance to functional women Education.

It is sad to say that most of the training equipment especially in the area of technology are lying idle or locked up in workshops or open fields in Nigerian schools because there are no trained personnel's to man such equipments.

Added to this, is the fact that the few personnel are sometimes frustrated out schools as a result of being over stretched and because of poor remunerations. Hence, they tend to eye industries where better remuneration for their professional skill is.

How can women be adequately prepared for functionality in the society when the pre-requisite knowledge for future occupation has not been adequately mastered due to lack of trained personnel's? What must be noted is the fact that only a strong, scientific and technological oriented education can pull Nigerian Society to the much desired modern era. How do we expect women who are regarded as nation builders as well as their male counterparts to function well in the society when only theoretical and shallow knowledge is the only language they understand?

Ezema (1978) found out that vocational education programmes in Nigerian schools does not prepare the students well for the world of work because the institutions are not well equipped and do not provide for industrial work experience for students.

There is also the lukewarm attitude of the government towards the provision of fund for the promotion of functional oriented subjects in Nigerian schools. Several schools that teaches commercial subjects have no typewriters. Home economics is taught theoretically in many schools whole chemicals cannot be fund in many laboratories. All these are major hinderances to functional education in our society.

Lack of proper guidance during school days can also be a major hinderance to functional women education. In spite of the availability of functional oriented subjects in most Nigerian schools, students still have wrong combination of subjects. As a result of this, several women offer course that cannot be regarded as job oriented. Since such mistakes are made, some women become a liability to their husbands and their relation if the are unemployed. This is usually a great blow on their social economic life as well as causing a set back for the nation who expects all recipients of education to participate in the building of a dynamic and verile society.

The motivation to go into skilled oriented subjects like Technical education is not in several female students because the society still have a prescribed role assigned to women.

Women themselves constitute a major barrier to functional education in the sense that many female students are unwilling to go into what is regarded as the traditional 'male fields' in large numbers. For instance, uptil today we have more girls than boys in the arts than in sciences (OLU 1987). In some cases where some are interested in such fields, the school curriculum sometimes emphasizes sex-role expectation. For example, in girls' secondary schools, subjects like woodwork, technical drawings, building, electrical/electronics, mechanical subjects etc are hardly emphasized even when they are part of the school curriculum for the school. In the same vein, it is considered to be out of place to seriously emphasize the teaching of Home-economics in boys' secondary schools.

These and several other factors inhibit functional women education in Nigerian society.

Meeting the challenges of functional women education in the next millennium.

In Nigerian, education has been adopted as an instrument per excellence for achieving the national objective (FGN, 1981 revised).

As an independent and developing nation confronted with the problems of nation building, social integration and economic development, education ought to be made functional if at all the objectives are to realised

One of Nigerian educational objectives is to produce citizens who are science and vocational oriented in order to achieve the aim of nation building, a modern technologically and industrialized nation.

Since jobs in the modern technologically industrialized economy does not necessarily depend on muscular power but on the acquisition of relevant skills and mental abilities, education in the next millennium should aim at producing women with the required skills and mental abilities in order for us to obtain greater technological height.

Female students should be encouraged to exercise their mental capacities in the sciences as well as in vocational subjects. Parents and teachers must encourage the females to develop towards self reliance and personal independence.

Breaking into exclusive men's world should be further encouraged. The society seems to be changing positively in favour of women on sex-role expectations. For instance a wide publicity was given to African's first woman commercial pilot in Nigeria sometimes ago, more of such should be encouraged.

Students especially the females should be well counselled and guided when it comes to choice of subjects and careers. Those who perform well in the sciences and the vocational subjects should be assisted to pursue occupation that the subjects have to offer.

Nigerian government must ensure that relevant facilities are supplied to schools. Laboratories and chemicals must be provided for if women education is to lead to nation building. Agricultural implements typewriters, introductory technology must be supplied to school.

Skilled personnel must be adequately supplied to schools and efforts should be made to retain them in schools. Their salaries and remunerations must be paid when due, when teachers are trained and are highly motivated they will display their best and this will definitely enhance functional education needed for the development of the individual and the entire society.

Government should allow for free and compulsory female education up to the senior secondary level.

There should be the establishment of legislature prohibiting women from getting married before the age of twenty-one.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to show that functional women education is a pre-requisite to the building of dynamic nation. For Nigerian society to develop in all ramifications the need for functional education cannot be over-emphasized. Functional education has been presented

as one of the ways in which Nigerian women can contribute meaningfully to the building of their individual homes and the society at large. When a woman is exposed to functional education the home will be liberated from poverty and the society will develop technologically. As long as the various barriers that negate functional education are removed Nigerian will become a nation to reckon with in the next millennium. For Nigerian to attain greater height in the next millennium, women who constitute half of Nigerian society must be exposed to all that will aid the advancement and the sustenance of the nation.

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