



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study sought to examine the role of women in teacher education. Woman as mothers, teachers, wage earners etc. have contributed greatly to educational development and teacher education in particular in Nigeria. Research studies examined have confirmed the impact they have made in teacher education in Nigeria. Being endowed naturally with those qualities a teacher needs for effective interpersonal relations, classroom interaction and effective teaching, they are able to groom, attend to the needs of learners more especially girls, model positive social values to learners and contribute to the creation of a more just society. However, research works reviewed revealed that in spite of these great strides, some constraints emanating from the social construction of roles due to the patriarchal system and pressure from family responsibilities have greatly limited their impact in teacher education. Some suggestions were made in order to eliminate these challenges among which are the elimination of those socio-cultural practices that adversely affect their effective functioning and the need to empower all educators to support gender equity in schools administration and management.

INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as the key that unlocks an individual's potentials for both self and national development. It is the foundation of scientific and technological transformations. As a result of the importance of education in national growth, developing and developed nations of the world

accord high priority to it; not just to increase access to education, but also to improve the quality of its delivery. It is a truism that the success of any educational enterprise, particularly as it affects process and quality depends greatly on the quality of teachers. This is due to the fact that the effectiveness of educational programmes is proportionally dependent on teacher-preparedness and classroom performance. Put differently, to achieve any socio-political, economic and scientific development in a country, there must be committed and quality teachers who are equipped with sound pedagogical- content knowledge to adequately equip learners with both hard and soft skills that would enable them compete favorably with their peers in the global knowledge driven market. Considering the fact that in Nigeria, the teaching profession is currently dominated by women, at least at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary education levels, any discussion on the role of education in national development will not be comprehensive without an analysis of the role of women in teacher education.

One may need to ask, who is a teacher and what are the qualities of a teacher? A teacher is not just anyone who stands in front of learners to deliver a lesson; he/she must be knowledgeable in order to deliver a good lesson. In addition, a teacher is one who handles learners with patience, affection and care, as they prepare them for the world of work. Teachers carry the burden of not only to educate and groom learners, but also to guarantee their attendance and completion of programmes. It is a fact that the educational success of girls and boys depends to a great extent on the teachers and these great strides cannot be achieved without the contribution of women as mothers and as teachers at formative stages. Little wonder then that they are seen as the hub of the school system and the manpower development of a nation. FRN (2013) affirms that no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers and that no nation can achieve economic, social and technological progress and self – sufficiency without a good system of education to sustain its achievement, (Akindutire & Ekundayo, 2012). This makes teacher education a critical aspect of national development since the quality and quantity of teachers form the crux of manpower development and training for innovation and prudent use and sustenance of resources in nation building (Buari, 2011). It is for this reason that the structure of teacher education in Nigeria is made up of two systemic components - pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes. It is systemic because the two complement each other for quality teacher production. Whereas the pre-service teacher education can be concurrent or consecutive, it is important teachers are continually effective and efficient. This necessarily demands lifelong

learning and invariably makes in-service training mandatory for the continuous professional development while they are still in service.

Women are naturally endowed with the qualities that a teacher needs for effective classroom performance and they include patience, determination, tolerance and care. A child's first teacher is the mother even when the teaching is informal. Women's skills in sustaining and maintaining their homes, grooming children right from the families make it possible for the nation to have youths that are making great impact in different spheres of life, including the teaching profession. As core educators, they teach the nation's prized values, knowledge, cultural heritage and wisdom to children and these are critical components of education when one considers the fact that the curriculum is rooted in the culture of the people. Female teachers combine their traditional roles of providing affection, nurture, and care to preparing children for life through effective teaching and learning of education content; these contribute immensely to human and national development.

The role of women in national development, including teacher education, cannot be over-emphasized. Women play multifaceted roles: they are actively engaged in the monetary economy (small scale businesses, wage labour, employment, etc) and control most of the non monetary economy (such as subsistence agriculture, bearing children, care for sick family members, domestic chores). In other words, women work both around the home and outside the home. For effective manpower development, the quantity of teachers produced to man the system must be properly balanced, vis-à-vis subject areas of specialization, levels of education they will teach and sex. Whereas emphasis on the right balance has always been in the areas of specialization and levels of education, not much attention has been given to sex. This deserves important consideration in view of the peculiar characteristics, traits and attitudes each sex brings to tasks that could have great influence on the development of learners especially teacher trainees. It is in the light of this that this study is carried out to examine the role of women in teacher education.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The disparity in roles between males and females is rooted in patriarchy. The term patriarchy is deeply embedded in the sexual division of labour in which, women find themselves charged with the responsibility for child/family care and domestic work while the men assign themselves roles that make women subservient to them. Patriarchy also signifies the historical emergence of particular forms of inequality between women and men which coincide with the socialization

patterns that channel women and men into different areas of work with different pay and status, (Alexander & Welzel, 2006; Wikipedia, 2014). Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) explain that it is this ideology of patriarchy resulting in an endocentric society and explains the variations in the formal leadership positions men and women occupy in schools and society. They further add that the theoretical perspective is illustrated by different ways that boys and girls are socialized into our culture, the lack of female role models in positions of formal authority and socio-cultural stereotypes about “what is ladylike” and “who looks like a leader”

However, the theory which has remained prominent as regards women and educational development is the “Women in Development” (WID) theory. This theory emerged in the 1970s and was adopted by United Nations Agencies such as UNDP and World Bank. It stems from the idea that education leads to economic and social development and this makes it mandatory for every hand to be on deck, more especially the inclusion of women who hitherto had been excluded due to the nature of the patriarchal power in the society, at the national, community, and household levels. WID theory posits that education helps women to acquire skills which enable them become more productive and contributes to development, (Bradshaw, Castellino and Diop, (2013). In other words, a gender-sensitive educational policy has great social and economic impact on the lives of the citizens as well as on national development since it integrates women into the national economies of their countries. There is also another related theory which is the Gender and Development theory (GAD), though very much related to the WID approach but more relevant to this study from the perspective that it recognizes not only the different impacts of development policies and practices on women and men but also sees women as agents of development not simply as recipients of development. It is in the light of these theories that the study will explore the roles of women in teacher education.

PECULIAR CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN AS ASSETS TO TEACHER EDUCATION

Teaching is an art; a lot of things combine to yield effective teaching in a classroom setting. This is aptly captured when Weiner and Kallós (2000) argue that women may actually be better teachers than men, not just because of any innate or biological abilities. In their view, it is so because women tend to be more socialized than men into nurturing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and providing a ‘caring’ environment in which young people can flourish. These attributes of women make them better teacher educators, especially in view of the

reluctance of the youth in enrolling into teacher education programmes. Supporting this, Eshete (2003) claims that women are more likely to develop 'relational ethics,' which can effectively be utilized in mentoring teacher trainees. Confirming the view, Eshete (2003) asserts that when students were asked whether they thought that women have special characteristics that make them good teachers, more than half of them affirmed and listed the following traits as being peculiar to female teachers that have influenced them:

- Women teachers easily understand their students.
- They try to help them and treat them impartially.
- Women teachers have good verbal communication ability.
- Women teachers are not bossy or dictators; they are tolerant.
- Women teach well and can be approached without fear
- Women teachers are kind to their students
- Female teachers do their work well, they teach well.
- Female teachers can understand students' problems.
- Female teachers do not get angry easily, (Eshete, 2003:30).

Furthermore, Weiner and Kallós, (2000) found that female teachers have a commitment to contributing to the creation of a more just society due to the fact that many female teacher educators do not see teaching in terms of quantifiable results, test scores, or mastery of 'facts'. Rather, they see the classroom as a place where consciousness is interrogated, where meanings are questioned, and criticism of the social world is encouraged. Consequently, the goal of teaching for women is grounded in a respect for the human value and the cultural world of their students. This also supports some of the reasons given above for preferring female teachers because they are impartial, not bossy or dictators, easy to approach, kind to students, and understand students' problems etc.

In the same vein, the unique position of a woman as a wife, a mother, sister, and grandmother places her on the top as an arbitrator wherever they function in the society. As teachers and educators they make a great difference in building a virile nation. A cursory look through the history of the nation shows that generally, women have shown unparalleled ability in initiating and making policies. Even when women are not in direct control, they have influenced policies indirectly through their linkages and when they have the opportunity, they are firm and fair, (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

WOMEN AS ROLE MODELS

The issue of being good role models is crucial in teacher education. Apart from the above- listed attributes which endear women to their students and which can positively facilitate school enrolment and completion rates, another compelling argument in favor of female teachers in the teaching profession is their positive impact on girl-child education. There is evidence to show a correlation between the number of women teachers and girls’ enrollment (Kirk, 2006). The presence of women in schools can also impact positively on girls’ enrollment and retention in school. Studies have shown a positive impact from women teachers on girls’ and boys’ achievement, (Huisman and Smits, 2009). A female role model can support and encourage girls to successfully complete their studies and this may even influence them to continue studying to become teachers, themselves.

Women as models provide emotional support to girls as they listen to their problems and provide guidance when necessary. In schools where girls are in the minority, especially in the rural areas and hard-to-reach areas, the presence of female teachers may also ensure protection for girls from unwanted attention from boys or male teachers, and even from sexual abuse, bullying and exploitation. Huisman and Smits (2009) found that as the percentage of female teachers increased in a school district, the likelihood that girls would go to school also increased. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2010), in its most recent education statistics digest, notes that the percentage of female teachers at the primary level correlates with girls’ gross enrollment rates in secondary school. This is because female teacher /educators can serve as role models demonstrating the possibility of taking up responsibilities other than the traditional roles given to women. Female teachers/educators can also provide support and offer advice on reproductive health issues, and advocate for the creation of physically and socially safe environment for female students (Mulugeta, 2012).

In the same vein, the peculiar features of women make female teachers attuned to the needs of learners and learners invariably see them as their role models. No matter the level of education, the greater the number of female teachers in schools, the better the girls' performance and the lower the dropout rates, (Stacki, 2002). Specifically, this study showed that students in teacher training institutions considered female teachers as showing more understanding of students' needs, being more accessible to students, and communicating better with their students. The more interesting aspect of this is that female teachers can be very effective in soliciting

psychological and social support for female students against the prevailing societal norms that have become serious constraints in their education especially, as it affects their completion rate. The more social and cultural disadvantage a girl faces, the more the presence of female teachers mitigates on some of the major social and familial factors that kept her out of school. Given the fact that schools are social settings where gender and sexual identities are constructed, negotiated, and officially sanctioned, the overall educational environment offers influential messages about gender and female teachers having experienced the exclusion and discrimination due to the patriarchal system, have learnt to use classroom space, learning experience and classroom interaction to discourage gender separation, bias and encourage team spirit and gender equity, (Thorne, 1993; Mulugeta, 2012). Having experienced discriminations arising from social construction of gender roles and patriarchal system, women understand the challenges most girls in teacher education institutions face and have become more active agents in breaking down walls between private and public spheres, creating positive social change that benefits women, girls and the society. This is why even when men in positions of authority assume the values and behaviors of patriarchy (Stacki, 2002), and use language that is gender- biased, and their attitudes suggest that they still expect girls to play subordinate roles, women teacher educators use their positions and attitudes to influence and counter the effects of these patriarchal traits on female student teachers. It is acknowledged that the presence of empowered female teacher in the classroom can be critical to grooming the girls into empowered women. This is because the female teachers serve as positive role models for them and they pass on new values to all their students including boys.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Female teachers provide new and different role as agents of change especially for learners in rural and conservative communities. They explore the possibilities for women to be active and assertive outside the home and thereby become agents of change in community development. By so doing, they play a central role in the socioeconomic development of any society. In fact, societal sustainable development is possible only if women are involved because they drive development from their individual families to the community where they live and the ripple effects of these are felt in the nation as a whole. Sadia (2014) adds that empowered women have a major role to play in the growth of a society as they have a greater sense of control over their lives and resources within the families.

As teacher educators, the interaction between the impact of education on women empowerment is obvious as it increases their earning capacity of women and makes them more marketable and employable and this has a spillover effect on younger women or girls vis-à-vis increased school enrollment and women's participation in the labor force as well as their contributions to household and national income. It is clearly obvious that the positive cyclical effects of these on other aspects of the society and the economy cannot be over-emphasized (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

At the school policy level, women teachers may act as advocates for girls, representing their perspectives and needs, and promoting more girl-friendly learning. For example, women teachers may be able to advocate for better sanitation in schools, gender responsive rules and regulations in the school management. These are of particular importance to adolescent girls who are menstruating or coming from culturally oppressive settings, and who may not actively participate in school or access the toilets because they are within the prying eyes of male students. In terms of menstruation, puberty, sex and reproductive health education, women teachers are playing significant roles in providing girls in school with accurate information about their own bodies and how to look after themselves; this will not only improve their sexuality and self concept but also facilitate retention and completion. Their efforts in this direction are equally critical in the reduction of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases as well as in helping the girls become assertive. This is critical because in the Nigerian culture, discussions about sexualities remain a taboo in spite of the adverse consequences it has on the girl child. Sexual and reproductive rights are not taught by parents despite its importance to the overall development of the learners and nation as well. There is no doubt that without the knowledge of these, women and adolescent girls cannot make right decisions on fertility; repeated childbirth keeps them away from school and from income generating activities as well as reduces their productivity. However, evidence shows that in the last two decades, women/female teachers have made great impact in this direction that has enhanced the female students, including student teachers' knowledge of their rights to sexuality and reproductive rights.

WOMEN ARE PRUDENT WITH MONEY

There is a general perception that women are 'good with money,' including being better at paying back loans, Aja-Okorie, (2013). The implication of these is that if women are placed in leadership positions, especially in teacher education institutions not only will they be more

accountable, they will also be more prudent in spending and transparent in funds management. Aja-Okorie, (2013) affirms that in all spheres of life, women have proved to be more prudent in their spending, more upright and honest, dedicated and committed to their profession than their male counterpart and their uprightness is attested to by the recent move in Anambra State where most of the court Magistrates are women. Also, cases of female misappropriation of funds are rare. The implication of these is that if more women are in government and in top managerial positions, not only will more funds be conserved but money will be spent on useful projects, (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE IN PLAYING SOME ROLES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In spite of the tremendous roles women play in human and national development, they still face huge challenges. One of them is that women are often marginalized to low status positions within the institutions. This means that men still dominate the higher prestige positions, leaving the low status positions for women, for instance, more women teach in the pre-primary, primary and secondary schools than at the tertiary levels. Malematsa (1998) supports that women are being held in mid-management positions with little or no managerial role and Malematsa(1998) adds that women are under- represented in the educational management and in the decision-making bodies in education, but they are strongly represented in the teaching work force. The implication is that their voices may be either excluded from policy and decision-making processes, or they may not be taken seriously. In the same vein, the negative attitudes they experience in the school, family and community due to the patriarchal nature of the society inevitably shape women's beliefs about themselves, their capabilities and aptitudes. This invariably prevents many women from playing the roles expected of them in teacher education. In this way, women's interests and concerns in their career development as well as their contributions to teacher education may be further blocked.

In the same vein, some women educators in tertiary institutions are adversely affected by institutional frameworks such as rules, regulations and established procedures for promotion set by the agencies governing the institutions- NCCE, NUC etc. Some of them include the 'publish or perish' rule which is seen as adversely affecting some women's right to promotion in spite of their hard work. This policy comes in conflict with female educators' family roles, especially in the face of the myriads of challenges they face in the family. A number of studies conducted in

the USA reported the differences between male and female faculty members with respect to their involvement in teaching and the type of satisfaction they derive from teaching related activities (Fapohunda (2011) Riemenschneider & Harper, (1990)). For instance, they found that females spend more time on teaching and attending to administrative demands of students than the male faculty members did. They also noted that promotion in academic rank for women is slower or stagnant compared to men. The reason given by women for failure to meet this standard is that they have too many family responsibilities which do not give them enough time or leave them with enough energy to engage in research and publications. Many of them reported lower research productivity, heavier teaching load and institutional services compared to their male counterparts. In this context, the role model potential of women teachers may be compromised if they are seen by girls (and boys) as always subordinate to men and are only assigned to low status roles within the school.

Moreover, the assignment of women to roles that are seen to relate to their nurturing and caring abilities (traditional roles) like the position of hall wardens and secretarial positions, messengers and cleaners rather than based on their intellectual capacities and skill tend to reinforce gender stereotypes. Also, the invisibility of women in some department in teacher education institutions like the Works Unit, Technical Unit and Vocational and technical education limits their impact on female students, (Ndahi, 2002). Supporting this, Malematsa(1998) affirms that ‘glass ceiling’ has been used to describe a barrier which keeps women from reaching high level management positions in organizations, yet too subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women to attain managerial positions.

From another dimension, Riemenschneider & Harper, (1990) argues that the constraints imposed on women are two-fold in that they do not only have to cope effectively with both career and family pressures, but that they also have to contend with males in the work sphere who erroneously believe that not only are they unable to manage everything, but that it is inappropriate for them to even attempt it. Although research does not support the notion that women cannot cope with these added responsibilities but men in positions of authority believe that family responsibilities adversely affect their job performance. In teacher education institutions, women are made to compete on an equal footing with men and many of these women reiterated that they are again handicapped from benefiting from training opportunities for the same reasons as family challenges (pregnancy, birth, bringing up children and managing

family affairs) and consequently they lose on promotion - especially in current situations where extended family or hired support is unavailable or risky. If women are assigned to positions in rural areas, they often face multiple obstacles when working away from their home, family and/or husband. In some parts of Nigeria it is culturally unacceptable and unsafe for women to travel long distances alone because they may be harassed by men or wrong to stay away from home, (Riemenschneider & Harper ,(1990) ;Mulugeta,2012).

However, Malematsa (1998) identifies innovations which are which have helped in minimizing some of the family constraints that women encounter. These include changes in basic family structures, simplified housekeeping due to the availability of modern technology (like washing machines, grinders etc.). Women today have fewer children and complete child bearing at an earlier age, attitudes are changing and some men are more willing to share more responsibilities for the home which have made more women to assume full-time careers as teacher educators etc.

SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Female teachers are still greatly influenced by some of the socio-cultural norms. Stacki (2002) asserts that women teachers most often encourage girls to be obedient or submissive, not to stand up for themselves or take risks. This implies that many female teacher educators perpetuate these stereotypical behaviors and pass on traditional messages that encourage boys to dominate class activities while discouraging girls from the same behaviors.

In addition, a central issue in career development is in-service training. An assessment conducted in three countries show that male and female teachers do not benefit equally and equitably from in-service trainings. A number of other factors have also been mentioned. In Nigeria 65% of the survey respondents indicated that problems related to marital responsibilities interfere with the opportunities for in-service training of female teachers. It was discovered that most married women are often reluctant to go for formal in-service training which is lengthy and may take them out of their homes as it will affect their responsibilities at home or cost them their marriage (Mulugeta, 2012).

Furthermore, many women are handicapped when they have to relocate in order to accept an appointment, or promotion to head an institution in another location due to family pressure and resistance (Malematsa,1998; Fapohunda 2011). Historically, women have moved with their husbands to new towns or countries, if the husbands' career demands it but this does not apply when a woman gets a new job or promotion which demands the relocation of the family. This

definitely affects their roles in teacher education as they cannot achieve higher status if they cannot relocate, given the number of teacher education institutions available and their locations. Women, especially those who are unmarried, find their gender roles clashing considerably with their official responsibilities. Pressures from family members to get married early and have children as early as possible were also mentioned as major challenges. It is equally evident that inability to get married affect their psyche as well as their roles as teacher educators even when they eventually get married they are forced to postpone their academic plans and professional development due to family responsibilities and these in turn adversely affect their career advancement and development, Doubleday, (2014). Doubleday adds that many women in academia hold themselves back due to the perception that advanced positions are not open to women and the fact that these higher-level positions make it difficult to leave time for their family beyond work. However, part of the responsibility lies with female academics, who must assert themselves in order to seek out these advanced leadership positions.

There are systemic constraints for women wishing to develop their career within the education sector, such as negative attitudes towards women’s ability to manage and lead schools, lack of female role models and long hours of work. Supporting the above view, Malematsa(1998) added that women managers’ major problem is work overload, with conflicts between home and work as a second major issue. Most surveys find that women managers are only half as likely as male managers to be married and many more divorced. Coe (1992: 10-11) in Malematsa(1998) survey of women members of the Institute of Management, for example, found that; 68% women were married, compared to 92% of men, and 12% women were divorced or separated, and only 5% were men. Of all the men and women who were married 49% of women had children compared to 86% of men. More than 70% men reported caring responsibilities than women, but women reported the much greater impact of caring on their careers.

Littlefield (1996) quoted in Malematsa(1998)found that 50% of women managers are childless compared with just 7% of their male counterpart. What many of those women share is a single minded dedication to work requiring investment of very long working hours which may have adversely affected their marital relationship.

In the light of the above, it is obvious that the academia is perceived as traditionally elitist, male and patriarchal in its workplace, culture, structure and values. As a result, women are found in lower academic ranks than men and are less likely to be tenured at professorial level and have

slower career progress. Though roles of women in schools are often defined in terms of their 'natural' affinities with children and their innate love for teaching and nurturing, nevertheless, women are critical actors in teacher education process. Consequently, neither can the history of national development or human capacity building in Nigeria be correctly written without the prominent role of women.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out to explore the role of women in teacher education in Nigeria. The findings from studies reviewed showed that women have made great contributions in the development of teacher education by being good role models, agents of change, providing good leadership, prudent in financial management, among others. However, studies also show that there are several challenges preventing them from contributing effectively to teacher education among which are failure by the professional sphere to accommodate the actual/practical needs of women; and the gap between equality on paper (policy) and in practice.

WAY FORWARD

Based on the foregoing the following recommendations are made:

1. Effort should be made by the government to domesticate all international agreements on the rights of women.
2. Those socio-cultural practices that adversely affect effective functioning of women should be eliminated
3. All educators need to be empowered to support gender equity in schools administration and management
4. Women teachers/educators should be trained to be assertive in order to encourage same in girls to discourage gender stereotyping in classroom interaction.

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