
ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA VIA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

OKORO, I.F.¹, UDEJI, N. C.²,
and IBEBUIKE U.O.³

¹²³ Department of Curriculum/Educational Technology,
Faculty of Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri, Imo State

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the concepts of curriculum implementation and gender. It identified and discussed different practices in which gender gaps are experienced. These include cultural practices, family and classroom including textbooks illustrations. Measures to improve on observed adverse conditions identified and discussed include curriculum review, awareness creation, effective classroom instruction, equal treatment of males and females, effective evaluation, recruitment of gender-sensitive-teacher-counsellor and creation of effective learning environment. It is recommended, among others, that curriculum and textbooks should be reviewed from time to time to include gender issues; teachers create and should maintain friendly classroom environments to reduce drop-out rate of female students, and, school personnel should be highly sensitized on gender issues.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The practice of gender inequity in almost every aspect of life has gained ground also in Nigerian educational system and beyond. This needs urgent correction for gender equity to be experienced in schools for eventual securement of sustainable future. Hence, a strong driving force initiated and proposed by education whereby the curriculum, which is organized, planned educational experiences, entrusted to school are adequately recognized. Curriculum considers the needs of society in its planning and these needs are built into the curriculum for implementation. Through this, women and girls as well as men and boys will be upgraded for societal improvement. To this, Nwagbara (2009:204) observes that,

*Curriculum is for educational development and drives the growth and progress of society and the individual, both male and female
...., people now realize that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (the women folk) remain ignorant.*

National Policy on Education (2004) sees education (on which curriculum implementation is its driving force) as an instrument of national development. Developmental impasse and difficulties are experienced by both uneducated nation and individual. Solution to this problem therefore calls for liberalization of education for the benefit of citizens of the nation including women folk for suitable national development.

Recently, emancipation of women through education, with its driving force as curriculum implementation, is where attention is focused. People now realize that sustainable human development cannot be effective if half of the human race (Woman folk) remain ignorant, marginalized and discriminated against (UNESCO, 1990).

The Concept of Curriculum

Curriculum means those educational experiences that are planned, organized and entrusted into the hands of the schools to disseminate to the learners. Curriculum implementation therefore means the actual execution of the organized planned educational experiences by the school to the learners using the needed materials and the desired efforts. Offorma (2005) asserts that it is the transmission of planned curriculum into the operational curriculum. Earlier, Mkpa (1987) posited that it is the task of translating the curriculum document into the operating curriculum by the combined efforts of the students, teachers and others concerned. Specifically, Mkpa (2005:11) emphasizes that curriculum implementation includes,

.... all that teachers do in lesson planning, lesson teaching

techniques, class control, motivation strategies, all curriculum and co-curriculum activities, application of psychological theories/principles of learning, including learner-friendly practices in our schools and instructional evaluation task..

Mkpa's observation tends to identify, among others, that teachers implement curriculum with their maximum efforts to ensure that intended behaviour is achieved with gender issues inclusive.

The Concept of Gender

Gender refers to specific central patterns attributed to both males and females in terms of behaviour and mannerisms. Taylor (in Nnachi, 2008) observes that gender is a set of assumptions about the nature and character of biological differences between males and females; assumptions that manifest in a number of ideas and practices that have a determinant influence on identity, social opportunities and life experiences of the human actor. As a result, sex identity of an individual, to a great extent determines how the individual perceives self in particular and how society at large perceives him. These affect what the individual is needed to do. This shows that gender stresses the sociological and cultural roles of men and women in a given society. Relating more on these roles, Kanno (2004:29) observes:

Gender expectations and limitations are couched in the process of socialization of all the individual member of the society. For instance, the boys are encouraged, right from early childhood stage, to develop certain masculine characteristics such as competitiveness, assertiveness, boldness, braveness, courage, curiosity, inquisitiveness fearlessness, independence, and the like. The girls are, from that early childhood stage, encouraged to be beautiful, quiet, charming, attractive, gentle, meek, mild, easy going, dependent and domestic oriented.

The identified qualities as visualized by the society in terms of boys and girls clearly bring to knowledge the different roles society should expect from these sexes. Undoubtedly, one takes the side of superiority while the other inferiority and girls are at the later side.

To this issue of superiority and inferiority, Davis (1999:13) notes that:

Gender determines the status of sexes of male being superior and female being inferior. That has shown inequality and fermented the entire human social structure and translated more glaringly in the provision and acquisition of the female,

Generally, Davis' observation signifies inequality in gender issues but the fact remains that whatever change that needs to be made, men and women merit equal consideration. Gender gap is seen as enemy of development. Hence, it needs to be addressed using policies.

In education, the concept of gender stresses on equal recognition of both sexes in terms of endowed abilities and competencies. Among the measures for achieving this is curriculum implementation. One may now ask the question. What practices employ this gender parity?

Curriculum Implementation and Gender Gaps

There are some gender problems resulting from bias and prejudices on which males are favoured more than females in curriculum implementation, in particular and education in general. These problems include:

- (i) Classroom practices,
- (ii) Family practices,
- (iii) General stereotyping practices,
- (iv) Cultural practices,
- (v) Textbooks illustrations and
- (vi) High rate of school drop-out.

Classroom Practices

The teacher who implements curriculum in the classroom initiates practices which, if not well handled, may discourage the educational attainment of the learners.

These practices are mostly caused by the teacher's impressions, biases and prejudices. Impression when formed by teachers, conditions them in decision making, especially as it relates to attitudes, thoughts and feelings about the learners. Most of the time, the females are referred to as being inferior. They are sometime seen as pretty faces without brains, incapable of critical thinking. Teachers' attentions are received by male learners who dominate the use of equipment in computers, science and technology studies (Nwagbara, 2009). Again, boys are appointed classroom monitors or spokesmen and questions are usually directed at them. They play football and wrestling while girls play netball and take part in singing and dancing (Mangvwat, 2006). Such phenomena show clear margin demarcating the grading of males from females.

Family practices

Educating male members of the family is preferred by most families to the education of the female members. This is mostly caused by poverty experienced by some families. This condition makes it impossible for them to finance the education of their children, irrespective of sex. Truly, Universal Basic Education (UBE) renders the services of free education. However, to some extent parents still need to spend money to buy school materials that are not provided by the government and pay fees for other miscellaneous items such as registration for external examinations. Poor families prefer managing to train their male children with the little they can afford because they believe that the males are permanent members of the family that will take care of them in future rather than the females who would marry and become members of other families. However, some families give serious attention and make astounding investments on female members of the house only when they have no male issues.

Gender stereotyping practices

Females are seen as being weak and performing simple roles. In school practices, some subjects are seen as masculine while others are seen as feminine. The females are deprived of studying key science subjects which are considered to be masculine. Such practices limit the brightness of one's future. Relating to this, Esiobu (in Nwagbara, 2009:209) observes that:

the effect of stereotyping has led to the under presentation of women in science and science related professions, such as Engineering, Architecture, Veterinary Medicine and Nuclear physics. The language and illustrations in textbooks and readers also speak volumes on gender stereotyping. Girls are portrayed as occupying a negative semantic space as opposed to boys who speak "the language which is bold and assertive.

Esiobu 's observations clearly identify the disparity in gender stereotyping.

Cultural practices

In some Nigerian culture, female children are prepared for early marriage, thus formal education of such children is seen as a taboo. Money for educating the males therefore culminates from the bride price of their female counterparts. A female child's place is seen as being strictly in the home. She requires little or no formal education but the male children should be educated, (Manguwat, 2006). This poor recognition given to females leads to their withdrawal from school for early marriage. Adewole (1997:5) observes,

Women are regarded as second or minor to men. For these reasons, instead of going to school, these parents would prefer their daughters to stay back at home and serve as sources of the family's labour. They cook, clean the compound and baby sit. These are detrimental to academic achievement of females. This practice invariably affects the nation's development.

Textbooks' illustrations

Some textbooks' illustration portray boys as being critical thinkers, heroes, intelligent and the like, while the girls are seen only as being soft or weak but excellent in keeping homes. These are utilized during instruction through illustrations, dramatizations and role-plays in the class.

High rate of school drop-out

According to the Nigerian Human Development Report NHDR (Mangvwat, 2006) in 1995, the average completion rate at primary school level for boys and girls completing five years, were 56.3% and 43.7% respectively. This shows 56.3% drop-

out rate for girls. In another report, Nigerian Human Development (Agu, 2007) shows a total number of out-of school girls, region by region. Nigeria falls within the African category and statistics shows that the sector has the highest percentage of girls who are out of school. Agu (2007) identifies the following reasons for this situation:

- i. The demand for girls as domestic helps,
- ii. Teenage marriage,
- iii. Teenage pregnancy,
- iv. Cost of girls' education since government pays only the tuition component of their fees and
- v. The attraction for quick money which low level jobs offer as they do not demand high powered skill as seen in GSM POS operators.

Furthermore, the result of an investigation carried out by Ugwuanyi and Olokan (2000) shows that the male enrolment figures surpass those of females even the census figure shows that girls are not being encouraged to come out for education, thus clarifying the bases for inequity.

Improving gender equity through curriculum implementation

For equal educational opportunity to be maintained between males and females for achieving education, curriculum implementation has many roles to play. Some of these roles can be visualized as follows:

Curriculum review

When curriculum is effectively implemented, the areas to be reviewed are exposed through results of the implementation. Inadequate implementation of curriculum yields little or no positive results. This signifies that essential issues such as gender inequality need to be incorporated in the curriculum in the course of it should be produced and reviewed, as the need arises, to strengthen curriculum implementation for achieving gender equity.

Creation of awareness

Curriculum implementation tends to identify the need for creating awareness to curriculum planners and developers, school personnel like teachers, principals and headmasters/headmistresses, administrators of education, counselors, supervisors of education and parents on the impact of gender issues. This sensitization will be followed by engaging on descriptive survey for determining the target population as well as different categories of women and girls needed for instruction. The contents of the instruction need to be planned in such a way as to meet the needs of society including different categories of women and girls. These categories include:

- i. Students for adult literacy classes and school girls and adult women,
- ii. Students of National Teacher Institute (NTI) programme,
- iii. National Certificate of Education (NCE) evening/weekend and regular programmes and
- iv. Students of skill acquisition centres for girls and women.

Effective instruction

Instruction means activities engaged in by the teacher and the learner to facilitate changes in the learners' behaviour, (Onyemerekeya, 2004). In the course of instruction, curriculum implementation recognizes the following for filling gender gaps:

- (i) Instruction is made for students who are women, girls, including men & boys who are the categories of the population earlier mentioned.
- (ii) Well trained teachers who are gender sensitized are employed to teach these females. They have adequate knowledge of gender inequality of which women and girls are regarded as inferior. It is this grade of teachers who are highly sensitive in identifying the problems arising from gender inequity to handle them amicably.
- (iii) The instrument of encouragement to the female students.
- (iv) The use of instructional methods such as problem solving, discovery, activity, experimentation and other practically oriented methods, in the course of instruction. These methods provide opportunity for critical thinking.

- (v) Curriculum contents are well planned, sequentially organized to suit different categories of women and girls.
- (vi) They are sufficiently aided with instructional materials needed for effective impartation of knowledge.

Equal Treatment

Filling of gender gaps is enhanced when learners' exposure to class activities and learning materials are made equal. In other words, preferential treatment should not be recognized and practiced. This situation makes the females feel highly valued. In addition, they have high moral confidence in the class. A healthy class interaction enhances females' participation in class activities. Questions asked in the class during instruction are equally directed to both males and females. In the course of organization of class discussion, males and females are made to participate equally, especially in leading the discussion.

Effective use of Evaluation

Evaluation is the measure taken to ascertain the extent to which objectives of instruction have been achieved. It takes the form of formative which takes place during the programme and summative which is carried out at the end of a programme. Every stage of instruction needs evaluation for necessary adjustment be made for the success of the programme. This calls for effective use of continuous assessment. As Yolo (in Ughamadu, 1994:10) simply puts it, continuous assessment is:

a method of evaluating the progress and achievement of students in educational institutions. It aims to get the truest possible picture of each student's ability, at the same time helping each student to develop his or her abilities to the fullest. It is a method whereby the final grading of students takes account in a systematic way of their whole performance during a given period of schooling.

Consequently, continuous assessment identifies the strengths and weaknesses of learners, hence provides sound basis for the teacher to know where to lay more emphasis. When evaluating instruments adequately constructed with the validity and reliability well assured, it gives a sound basis for the teacher counsellor to see where to lay hands in directing and advising the learners.

Gender sensitive counsellor

Curriculum implementation for gender equity recognizes the services of gender-sensitive-teacher counsellor. This is inevitable in that the teacher guides and directs the learners for their academic improvement. The counsellor weighs the strengths and weaknesses of the learners in the course of instruction and through evaluation. This guides him in advising the learner on his choice of subjects as well as career. The learner should be objectively guided in such a way that he chooses his subjects or career by himself. The counsellor renders advice at every stage of the learners' academic progress, based on the performances of learners. The counsellor ensures that educational pursuit of learners is not faced with problems.

Creation of favourable learning environment

Learning environment is said to be conducive when every need for effective teaching and learning is provided. Conducive learning environment is free from hazards and dangers, like sexual harassment by male teachers and big boys in the school. It recognizes the condition when the teacher is democratic, friendly, humane, accommodating, among others.

Adequate funding for staffing, equal provision of instructional materials and incentives to both males and females are also necessary components of favourable environment. Equal assignment of leadership roles to both males and females and the conditions aforementioned tend to keep females in school, thereby reducing their drop-out rate.

Conclusion

Female education is highly beneficial and contributes to overall development of the nation, either in terms of promotion of health care or generation of income, social welfare and security, among others. Gender inequity is experienced both in schools and the entire nation to the disadvantage of the females. Levels of education

need equity assurance of males and females through their equal participation in educational activities in the course of curriculum implementation.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Curriculum should be reviewed to include gender issues. This should be aided with adequate textbooks' production which should be reviewed from time to time for their authenticity for achieving gender equity.
- (ii) Teachers stereotyping should be discouraged in schools and females should be encouraged to study science, mathematics and technology.
- (iii) Society, parents, schools and religious bodies should be made aware of the need for gender equity and de-emphasized indoctrination.
- (iv) There should be recruitment of teacher-counsellors who are gender-sensitive to always render pieces of advice on this issue.
- (v) Teachers should ensure proper and adequate provision of materials for effective implementation of the reviewed curriculum. This should be followed by effective supervision of how instruction is carried out.
- (vi) Government should establish more female schools to help cater for female education.

If the recommendations are strictly adhered to, it will go a long way to providing a better nation by restoring equity between males and females.

REFERENCES

- Adewole, I. (1997). *Right of girl-child*. A key note address delivered at a workshop on the right of girl child, in 1997.
- Agu, S. (2007). Gender equality, education and women empowerment: The Nigerian challenge. *Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Research Development*, 8(2), 1-7.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004). *National policy on education*. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Kanno, T.N. (2004). Gender education and human resource development. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 11(1), 29-34.
- Mangvivat, B. (2006). Politics of basic education and gender issues: *Politics of Nigerian education*. The Nigerian Academy of Education, 21st Annual Congress. E. Eke and R.D.O. Larinoye (Eds), P. 31-39.
- Mkpa, M.A. (2005). Challenges of implementing the school curriculum in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 12, (1), 9-17.
- Mkpa, M.A. (1987). *Curriculum development and implementation*, Owerri: Totan Publishers Ltd.
- Nnachi, R.O. (2008). Gender needs for the equalization of educational opportunities in Abia State: Psychological and counseling interventions. *Nigerian Journal of Research and Production*, 12(2), 9-19.
- Nwagbara, C. (2009). Gender issues in curriculum implementation. *Curriculum Theory and Practice*. U. M.O. Ivowi, K. Nwufor, C. Nwagbara, J. Ukwugwu, I.E. Emech & G. Uya (Eds), Nigeria: CON.
- Offorma, G.C. (2005). Curriculum implementation for functionality. *Issues in Contemporary Education*. S. O. Oraifo, G. C. Edozie & D.N. Ezech (Eds), Benin City: Da-Silvia Influence.
- Onyemerenkeye, B.C., (2004). *Principles and methods of teaching and learning*. Owerri: Versatile Publishers.
- Ughamuda, K. A. (1994). *Understanding and implementing continuous assessment*. Benin: World of Books Publishers.
- Ugwunay, C. & Olokun, M. (2000). Gender imbalance in teacher production in colleges of education: The need for redress. *The teacher production, utilization and turnover patterns in Nigeria*. Kaduna: NCC Publications.
- UNESCO (1990), *The state of education in Nigeria*, Lagos: Excellence Systems Ltd.