



# REPOSITIONING NATIONAL UNITY THROUGH GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

By

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## **Abstract**

*Gender equality is a trending concept that can help in repositioning the national unity which is at the verge of collapsing if allowed in educational practices. Gender equality in education can help in ensuring that both men and women have equal access to education to enhance their knowledge and skills which is essential for the unity of the society. It is often said that no nation can rise above its educational levels. This paper looked into some concept such as gender equality, gender equality in education, national unity and host of other issues. Relationships between education and national unity, gender and national unity and roles of gender equality in education for national unity were discussed. It was concluded that to have unity in the family, society and the nation males and females, young and old should be given equal opportunity, especially in education. Challenges hindering equal access to educational training were also discussed and few recommendations were suggested such that Government, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders should help in enlightenment and negative socio-cultural beliefs that prevent women from education should be corrected.*

**Keywords:** Gender equality, National unity, Gender equality in education.

## INTRODUCTION

Education has been seen as a means of empowering and liberating individuals. It promotes national unity and encourages individual to be awake to the task of national unity in all the nations of the world. It has been stated here that there is need to take care of all the categories of people regardless of the gender, tribe, location and other factors. Maximum investment in education helps to achieve many goals and increase the rate of achievement (USAID, 2010). Researches have shown that education is one of the effective investments a country can embark upon for development; it is evident that there has been annual increment in enrolment that improves literacy rate. This is evident in gross domestic products (GDP) increment (Basic Education Coalition, 2004).

Education also builds human capital that is needed for economic growth (USAID, 2010) and produces significant improvement in health, nutrition and others. Countries with educated citizens are more likely to be democratic and stable in all forms of human (USAID, 2010). Thus, gender equality is imperative for a nation to attain reasonable level of development in all human spheres. Gender is referred to as the relationship and difference between men and women which are learned (Okwumu, 2015). Gender can also be defined as a set of character roles and behavioural patterns that distinguish women from men socially and culturally (Women Information, 2015).

National Policy on Education (2013) (NPE) acknowledges the need to equalise educational opportunities between males and females. It emphasises girls' access to basic education in some states in the North is very low (United Nation International Children Education Funds). Between 25% - 35% of women in North East and North West are literate and have attended formal school.

It is evident that education is an instrument for change, transformation and national unity. It exposes both men and women to the same opportunity to unite and live together. Accessing same education opportunities by men and women gives equal chance to improve them and allow them to contribute to national unity. This paper discusses issues of gender equality in education, education and national unity, gender equality and national unity and roles of gender equality in education and national unity.

### **What is Gender Equality?**

Gender equality is a situation where men and women have equal right, freedom and opportunity for realising their full potentials and contribute to social, economic, cultural and political development of their society (OECD, 1998). UNESCO in 2014 referred to gender equality as opportunity for females and males to have equal rights, freedom, conditions and opportunity for realising their full potentials. Literally, gender equality suggests situation where males and females have equal opportunities by policy to exercise their full right with capacity to contribute to and benefit from their society. It implies that there must be parity equity and openness in institutional aspect of life, especially formal education (USAID, 2010).

### **National Unity**

National unity simply implies that all citizens of a country are united, co-creating, sharing and working together for the collective good of all the people in the country. National unity presupposes the existence of cultural and social diversity in our nation. It also implies the need to combine our efforts and resources in view of our diverse cultural heritage and forge a

common front which is noble to building our nation. National unity fosters peace and progress.

### **Education and National Unity**

Education is regarded as the sum total of the experiences from birth till death, be it formal, informal or non-formal. It is for modeling a child or an adult into a whole individual to enable him or her contribute to the unity of his or her society. For unity to hold, it entails cooperation of all in the society towards achieving a good living status. National unity is an embracing concept fully supported by the progressiveness of a nation and usually measured in terms of relative peace and progress of people within a society (Yusus & Adebumu 2015). It is this unity that revolves round the economy, politics, social, cultural and attitudinal behaviours of the people in a given society. It could therefore be suggested that national unity has to do with cooperation and allegiance that emanate from the visible progress in economic, social, political status of the people among others.

### **Gender Equality & National Unity**

National unity is achievable when men and women are given equal opportunities to express and participate actively in all spheres of socio-economic and political life of the society. Gender participation is necessary to contribute to the economy and social growth and progress of the society (Adebayo, 1997). Research evidence available supported that equitable participation of men and women in the social, economic and political life of the society can lead to increased economic growth of the society and also improve the welfare and cooperation of the family and society (Hossain, 2014, Abdulquadri, 2011).

In addition, the importance of gender equality for national unity were discussed at various conference held in regards to that such as (EFA) Education for all held in Geneva in 1990, Beijing conference of 1995 also Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) were all discussed gender equality and items number 2 and 3 of MDGs emphasis on general on achieving Universal primary education and promotion of gender equality and empowering women (Oladele 2013). Conclusions of various conferences on equality of gender make it a focus area to be attended to by the educational stake-holders and government. The focus on this could lead to national unity when every gender is given the opportunity and access to education equally.

### **Gender Equality in Education**

Gender equality in education allows both boys and girls freedom to access and attend school, to learn and participate freely in a safe, non-discriminatory area, to have gender sensitive, value and enjoy economic, political and cultural opportunities (Aikman 2007). UNESCO 2003 also state that gender equality in education can be fully attained when girls and boys are offered the same opportunity to go to school, with a teaching method and curricular free of stereotypes and enjoy counseling free of gender negative and discrimination. The above supports and opines that gender equality in education is aimed towards ensuring that no gap in equality in education opened. That is all avenue for gender inequality is closed.

Wilson 2003 opined that gender equality in education is in three dimensional approached:

1. The right to education aiming to secure equality of opportunities, boys and girls should be given same chance to access schooling.

2. Right in education. This aiming at equal right of pedagogy when boys and girls receive same treatment and attention, follow same curricula, enjoy same teaching methods and free of stereotype and gender bias.
3. Right through education aiming for the equality of outcomes as a result of education and beyond in society more generally. USAID (2010) gave the fourth dimension to the approach as comprising equality of access equality in the learning process and equality of educational outcomes and the equality of external results. Upon the clamor of equality of education for both boys and girls, there is a wide gap in the enrolment rate in schools.

Table below shows the gender enrollment in public primary school in ten (10) years 2000-2010 in Nigeria.

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Diff.</b>
2000	10,738,025	8,413,413	19,151,438	12%
2001	10,583,411	8,457,812	19,041,223	11%
2002	11,070,610	8,791,071	19,861,681	11%
2003	14,434,764	11,338,280	25,773,004	12%
2004	11,828,499	9,571,016	21,395,510	11%
2005	12,189,073	9,926,369	22,115,442	10%
2006	12,492,091	10,369,793	22,861,884	9%
2007	11,683,503	9,948,567	21,632,070	8%
2008	10,768,742	9,223,567	19,992,307	8%
2009	10,791,896	9,288,980	20,080,876	7%
2010	11,027,686	9,636,119	20,663,805	7%

Source: Universal Basic Education UBE 2018.

The table above shows that there is a wide gap in the enrolment in public primary school between boys and girls in the years running. To therefore ensure unity and development, equality in education for both genders is important because education is a major tool teach individual about unity and to ensure national unity.

Oladele (2013) citing UNESCO (2010) contended that only 48% of males enrolled on secondary education while only 37% are females. In the public primary education, the enrolment is a bit fear but the gap still exits while that of higher institution is 3.9%. The gap between male and female enrolment shows that educational opportunities are not equal and that there is a gross gender imbalance between boys and girls educational enrolment in the country.

### **Roles of Gender Equality in Education for National Unity**

For national unity to be promoted, gender equality in education plays paramount roles such as:

#### **- Increase Cohabitation**

Co-habitation entails living together peacefully with other tribes, races and beliefs. Gender equality in education will promote this and let our society remain united. Gender equality in education give advantage to both male and female to live together even if they are of different background, because they would have learn reason for living together.

- **Promote productivity and Eradicate Poverty**

To alleviate poverty one needs education with skills that will allow one to be engaged. (Okemakinde, 2017) opines that poverty alleviation involves the strategic use of tools as education, economic, health and income distribution to improve the livelihoods of this world.

When productivity is increased in the society everyone will be busy, united in interaction and transaction thus bring out real improvements in the lives of the people. Thus, when boys and girls are given the same opportunity to acquire educational training or have same access to education, they will all acquire economic skills that will help them to come out of poverty.

- **Reduce Violence/Crime in the society.**

Violence and crimes are the order of the day, insecurity in the society is on the high rate, and the perpetrator of these crimes involves both men and women without education or partially educated. (Ohaja 2012) stress that violence manifest in different forms in the society. Therefore, given the nature of violence regardless, education play a major role in initiating role when boys and girls acquire equal education within the society, it thereby reduce the rate of violence and crimes.

- **Increase Literacy rate**

Literacy is regarded as ability of individual to read, write and calculate. Acquisition of basic literacy is not enough for individual to survive the socio-economic needs and demand. This is more reason why equal access to literacy education with socio-economic and work oriented needs of the recipients.

**Challenges in promoting National Unity through Gender Equality in Education.**

○ **Religion:**

It is obvious that religion/belief has influence on the women status and their access to equal education as men do. Islamic culture is known for this attitude of women's education status and employment Alumode, (2010). He also opined that Pudah system keeps women away from assessing education. It also reduces the chances of young girl who are in Purdah to hawk, work and engaged externally.

○ **Socio-Cultural Beliefs:**

Nmadu (2000) observed that Nigeria-Society has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potentially immoral to women's emancipation, such as early marriage, widowhood practices and inheritance. Adeniran (2010) has supported this by observing that the traditional and social structure gave limited incentives for amending the existing distribution of power between men and women in Africa. To this end the socio-cultural set up in most part of the country only encourages male education than female counterpart. Social background and family structure of a girl depend on their chances of enrollment for formal education. Only enlightened parents or families do not accept the negative belief against female education (Ajala, 2013).

○ **Family Commitment:**

Family workload and commitment has been an obstacle to gender equality in education which negatively affects national unity. Access to formal education of women has been constrained due to household commitments and workload.

○ **Socio-Economic Status of Families**

In most developing nation of the world, poverty is the order of the day. Nigeria is not left out the scourge of poverty within the families though richly endowed with human and material

resources yet majority still live below poverty line (Nnajieta, 2013). As a result of poverty within the family a number of children may have to make choice as to who will go to school and who will stay behind. These financial challenges make parents to place value on education of male child to girl child. Adeyemi, opined that among the low income learners and illiterate parents who cannot afford formal education for their many children, they choose to send male children to school at the expense of the female or marry off their female children regardless of the age to raise support for male education. Thus, since it has been established that seven out of every ten Nigerians live less than US \$1.00 per day, it shows financial constraints are inimical to equitable access to education.

## **Conclusion**

Without mincing words, gender equity in education is a thing that needs more attention of both the stakeholders in education and government, equity in education and education is very germane for national unity. It goes a long way to ensure that both genders are empowered and equipped with adequate knowledge and skills for the unity of the country especially in the area of equal access to educational training programmes. Thus, with gender equality to education, training, knowledge and empowerment needed for the unity of the nation will be acquired in schools and will enhance unity in different sectors of the society.

## **Recommendations**

As discussed in the paper, the following recommendations are made.

- All religious organizations should preach, promote, and emphasis gender equality in education. It will encourage members to be able to read, write and be equipped with right knowledge for unity.
- As important as education is needed for the unity, more efforts should be made by the stakeholders in education to allow and ensure that education is accessible by being free from primary level.
- Curriculum planners and policy makers on education should ensure the inclusion of subjects and activities that will ensure unity among the tribes, race and ethnicities in the country.
- Every child should be allowed to have equal access to education by parents. They should also ensure that house chores are done by both male and female to disallow overburden of domestic work on a particular gender.
- Three tiers of government, non-governmental organizations, educational agencies and stakeholders should put up more efforts in enlightening people of various tribes, socio-cultural beliefs that women should have equal access to education like men.

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