

## Women Access to Tertiary Education in Bende LGA, Abia State Nigeria- Problems and Prospects

Mbah Lucy Ucha

Plateau Private School, P.O Box 1498 Jos- Plateau State, Nigeria

Rose Maiyaki

College Of Education, Akwanga, Nassarawa State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study was on women access to tertiary education in Bende LGA of Abia State ,aimed at identifying those factors that hinder women access to tertiary education. The study raised four research questions and one hypothesis. The study adopted the cross sectional survey design. The sample consisted of 672 women from Bende LGA. Data were obtained using a questionnaire tagged Women Access to Tertiary Education Questionnaire (WATEQ). Analysis of data was by the application of the percentage and the Pearson's correlation analysis. Results showed that factors that cause poor women access to tertiary education include early marriages, home and HIV/AIDS. Also, the attitude of the Nigerian society towards women education was unfavourable. Similarly, some of the effects of poor women access to education include, lack of skills or training needed for some appointment and dearth of women in some influential positions .Remedies to poor women access to tertiary education include subsidizing the cost of education and abolishment of some harmful religious and cultural practices. Equally, a significant relationship was found between societal attitude towards women education and women access to tertiary education. The study recommended that some harmful cultural and traditional beliefs be abolished. Also, there is need to subsidize the cost of education to encourage women access to tertiary education.

**Keywords:** Women, Access, Tertiary Education, Problems, Prospect

### 1. Introduction

Education is an instrument per excellence for achieving national objectives (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). This is because education is the means of acquiring competence traits, abilities and skills necessary for effective performance and participation in all areas of life. It is a truism and an acceptable fact that the social economic and technological advancement of any nation is, to a large extent dependent on the level of education of its citizenry. The importance of education in the overall well-being on any individual and the nation at large cannot be undermined. It was in the recognition of the importance of education in national development that Education For All (EFA) was launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society (Maduabun, 2004).

It is important to note that after a decade of slow progress in achieving these laudable objectives, the international community re-affirmed its commitment to EFA in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000, and again in September of that same year. In September, 2000, 189 countries including Nigeria, and their partners adopted the EFA goals again (Obanya, 2004).

In pursuance of these objectives, Nigeria recognizes education as a fundamental human right in May 27, 2008, and is signatory to the major conventions of the protection of the rights of children (girl and boys) and women (Obanya, 2004). Since the inauguration of EFA, several efforts have been made by the Nigerian government and international community to encourage girl-child education and access to quality education (Ukeje, 2000). At the world level, the World Bank supports the education for all Fast Track Initiative (FTI) as the primary vehicle for accelerating progress towards quality, universal primary education and other EFA goals. The World Bank supports EFA through specific operations in almost 90 countries worldwide through multi dimensional efforts which are aimed at:

- ❖ improving primary school access and equity as well as educational quality and learning outcomes.
- ❖ improving the dropout and retention rates of girls as well as their learning outcomes
- ❖ helping education systems cope with HIV/AIDS.

- ❖ promoting early childhood development
- ❖ protecting EFA prospects in fragile states.

Similarly, at the national level, Nigeria in 1999 launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) which offers a nine year free compulsory education of all school-age children including boys and girls. The UBE comprises of 6-year primary and 3-year junior secondary education which is known as basic education (Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN, 2000). To ensure adequate compliance of all the states to UBE specification Nigerian government enacted the UBE law to fast-track the attainment of EFA goals. All states have now passed UBE laws.

Looking at all these concerted efforts by the federal government and the international communities to ensure equity in terms of gender in access to education, one will expect a 50-50 rate of enrolment of both boys and girls in education at all levels of education. However, the 2005 National School Census (NSC) revealed a net Primary Enrolment Ratio (PER) of 70% for girls in some states in the south and 24% for some states in the north. The picture is worse in secondary and tertiary levels with national female enrolment of 44%. The regional breakdown shows an alerting disparity with girls NER of 60% in the south-west while the north-west shows dismal 10% (FGN, 2005).

Ukeje (2005) observed that between 2002 and 2005, enrolments rates improved for males by 3% (from 83.4% to 86.4%) while they declined for females by 8% (from 83% to 75%). Gender participation (measured by Gender Ratio-(GR) still favoured males with wide variations in gender gap in access to education at all levels across the nation (Obanya, 2008).

The story is not different in terms of female enrolment in Bende LGA, Abia State. Enrolment ratio into tertiary institutions shows a disfavour to the female gender. Data available at the Bende LGA secretariat shows the enrolment rate of male and female students in Bende LGA has been favourable towards the male gender. The detail of enrolment status into tertiary education over a period of five (5) years is presented in Table I.

**Table 1:** Enrolment Rate into Tertiary Institutions in Bende lga (2009-2013)

s/no	Year	Total enrolment	Male	Male %	Female	Female %
1	2009	17,280	11,970	69.3%	5310	30.7%
2	2010	18,978	12,138	64.0%	6840	36.0%
3	2011	22,015	16,529	75.1%	5486	24.9%
4	2012	23,216	13,036	56.2%	10180	43.8%
5	2013	25,007	18,562	74.2%	6445	25.5%

**Source:** Bende Local Government Area Education (Statistics and Record unit) (Jan, 2013).

The above statistics show the deplorable state of female enrolment and access to education at tertiary level in Bende LGA. Even lately, the Federal Government through the office of the first lady; Dame Patience Goodluck Jonathan has moved a 65%: 35% male-female affirmation in politics, all to enhance female enrollment in education. All of these efforts seem not to have yielded the desired results as female enrollment in tertiary education is still low. If this trend of low female enrollment continues unabated, one wonders what will be the future of the Nigerian society in terms of access to education. This is because male and female citizens have their own roles to play for the advancement of the society. It is against this background and in a bid to seek solution to poor female enrollment that the present study is being conducted which aimed at identifying factors responsible for low enrollment of women in tertiary institutions in Bende LGA of Abia State.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

It is widely accepted that the social and technological advancement of any nation is to a large extent a function of its educational development of her citizenry. Also, the citizenry comprises of males and females. Every gender is entitled to education because education is meant to help citizens acquire relevant skills necessary for meaningful contribution in the society. As such the federal government of Nigeria had launched UBE to give equal access to all children (including females) to acquire basic education. The acquisition of basic education is necessary because male and female citizens have important roles to play in the development of the society.

In a bid to ensure gender equity in access to education several measures has been embarked by the federal government and the international communities. Such measures include the EFA, the inauguration of Girls' Education Project (GEP), the Nigeria Girls' Education Initiative (NGEI) among other (Rahji, 2009).

However, it is sad to see that all of these efforts have not addressed the problem of low female enrollment in schools adequately. This is typified by the submission of Offorma (2009) which stated that there is a gender bias in favour of males in enrollment status. The danger is that this trend of low female enrollment is not to the good of the nation. If this low female enrollment is not addressed, the aim of UBE, EFA and all other educational policies geared towards providing equal access to education for all children irrespective of gender may be an illusion.

The problem of the study is embedded in this broad question "which factors are responsible for the decline of women access to tertiary education in Bende Local Government Area?"

### **3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors responsible for low women enrollment into students' enrolment into tertiary institutions in Bende LGA. Specifically, the study intends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify factors influencing female enrolment in Bassa LGA, especially in tertiary institutions.
2. To find out the attitude of the Nigerian society towards women's education in Bende LGA.
3. To find out the effect of poor women access to tertiary education on female employment and appointment.
4. To suggest ways of improving women's access to tertiary education.

### **4. Research Questions**

The study is guided by these research questions:

1. What factors influence women's access to tertiary education in Bende LGA?
2. What is the attitude of the Nigerian society towards women's education?
3. How has poor women's access to education affected their employment and appointments?
4. How can women's access to tertiary education be improved in Bende LGA?

### **5. Hypothesis**

The hypothesis below which was tested at 0.05 level of significance was formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between societal attitudes towards women's education and their access to higher education.

### **6. Methods and Procedures**

The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design. The population for the study consisted of 13,445 women in Bende LGA.

The sample consisted of 672 women who were randomly selected from 6 major towns in Bende LGA. The sample 672 represents 5% of the total population of the study. The study used a questionnaire tagged Women Access to Tertiary Education Questionnaire(WATEQ).The WATEQ is a three- point structured questionnaire which was designed by the researchers in line with the objectives of the study. The content validity of the instrument was sought by experts' judgment. The three experts used certified that the WATEQ is of high content validity.

The reliability of the questionnaire was established using the test-retest method using a sample of 45 women who were not part of the main sample of the study but possessed similar traits as the main sample. A reliability measure of between 0.72 was obtained.Data were analyzed using percentage and the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient for all the research questions and hypothesis respectively. Statistical decision was taken at 5% confidence level.

## 7. Results and Discussion

### 7.1 Results

#### 7.1.1 Research Question One

##### 7.1.1.1 What factors influence women's access to tertiary education in Bende LGA?

**Table 1:** Factors Influencing Women's Access to Tertiary Education in Bende LGA

s/no	Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %
1	Religious beliefs and practices	600(89.2%)	62(9.3%)	10(1.5%)
2	Cultural and traditional	639(94.9%)	28(4.3%)	5(0.8%)
3	Parental and societal attitude towards girl children. education	557(82.8%)	91(13.6%)	24(3.6%)
4	Low income status and poverty	672(100%)	-0%	-0%
5	Male child preference	614(91.4%)	58(8.6%)	-0%
6	Early marriages	663(98.6%)	9(1.4%)	-0%
7	Home violence and HIV/AIDS	667(99.3%)	5(0.7%)	-0%

The widely accepted factor influencing women's access to tertiary education is that of low income status and poverty which all respondents agreed to. This represented 100% of the total respondents. This is closely followed by early marriages which 98.6% agreed to. However, the least agreed factor is parental and societal attitude towards girl children's education which 82.8% of the respondents agreed to.

#### 7.1.2 Research Question Two

##### 7.1.2.1 What is the attitude of the Nigerian society towards women's education?

**Table 2:** Attitude of Nigerian Society Towards Women's Education

s/no	Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %
1	The society feels it is needless to educate women	546(81.2%)	50(7.4%)	76(11.4%)
2	Women need no formal education as they must end up in a kitchen.	600(89.3%)	72(10.7%)	-0%
3	Male children are future men, and bread winners hence should be educated more.	624(92.8%)	29(4.2%)	19(2.8%)
4	Our culture does not encourage giving equal opportunities to both male and female children.	648(96.4%)	24(3.6%)	-0%
5	I rather give out my daughter in marriage early, so no need of higher education	552(82.2%)	120(17.8%)	-0%
6	Educating women can expose them to societal evils.	576(85.7%)	55(8.1%)	41(6.2%)

Going by the data in Table 2, the widely exhibited attitude of Nigerian society towards women education is that the culture does not encourage giving equal opportunity to both male and female children which 96.4% agreement, while the least exhibited attitude is that the society feel it is needless to educate women with 81.2%. It can be deduced that the attitude of the Nigerian society towards women education is unfavourable.

## 8. Research Question Three

### 8.1 How has poor women's access to tertiary education affected their employment and appointments?

**Table 3:** EFFECT of Poor Women Access to Tertiary Education on Women's Employment and Appointments

s/no	Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %
1	There is dearth of women in influential positions.	624(92.8%)	24(3.6%)	24(3.6%)
2	Most women lack the skills or training needed for some appointments.	672(100%)	-0%	-(0%)
3	Managerial efficiency and continuity are often lacking in some women in high positions	624(92.8%)	24(3.6%)	24(3.6%)
4	Most times, some women feel shy or weak to take up appointments.	528(78.6%)	120(17.8%)	24(3.6%)
5	Family-issues and traditional beliefs tend to interfere with women's employment and appointment.	363(57.3%)	260(39.6%)	49(7.2%)

Poor women access to tertiary education has affected women's employment and appointment mostly in the aspect of many women lacking skills or training necessary for some appointments with 100% acceptance; other areas include dearth of women in some key positions (92.8%) and poor managerial efficiency and lack of continuity (92.7%) among others. However, the least accepted effect is that of interference of family issues with women's employment with only 57.3% affirmative response.

### 8.2 Research Question Four

#### 8.2.1 How can women's access to tertiary education be improved in Bende LGA?

**Table 4:** Remedies Low Women Access to Tertiary Education in Bende LGA

s/no	Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %
1	Subsidization of the cost of education.	624(92.8%)	48(7.2%)	-0%
2	There is need for abolition of some harmful religious and cultural practices	650(96.6%)	22(3.4%)	-0%
3	It is important to abolish some gender negative feelings against girl child education	576(85.7%)	82(12.2%)	14(2.1%)
4	Adequate education of the general public and parents is necessary any.	576(85.7%)	72(10.7%)	24(3.6%)
5	Persecution of erring parents or guardians by the government.	480(71.4%)	120(17.8%)	72(10.8%)
6	Early marriage should be discouraged.	624(92.9%)	48(7.1%)	-(0%)
7	Both male and female children should be given equal access to education and job placement.	624(92.8%)	48(7.2%)	-(0%)

Evidences in Table 4 reveal that the widely accepted remedy to poor women access to tertiary education is that of abolition of some harmful religious and cultural beliefs with 96.6% affirmative response. Closely related to this is the need to subsidize the cost of education (92.8%) and abolition of some gender negative feelings against the female children (92.8%). However, the least acceptable measure is the issue of prosecution of erring citizens (parents and guardians) by the government with 71.4% agreed response.

### 8.3 Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between societal attitudes towards women's education and their access to higher education.

**Table 5:** Pearson's Correlation Analysis of Effect of Societal Attitude Towards Women's Access to Tertiary Education

Variables	Statistics								
	N	X	SD	$\alpha$	df	r-cal	r <sup>2</sup> -cal	r-crit.	Decision
Societal attitude		3.418	2.019						
	672			0.05	2689	0.816	0.6658	0.195	Reject H0
Women access to Tertiary education		3.502	2.615						

Table 5 shows that our calculated r-value of 0.816 is greater than table value of 0.195 at a degree of freedom of 671; hence, we have enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternative hypothesis. This leads to the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between societal attitudes and women's access to tertiary education.

## 9. Discussion

On the factors that influence female enrolment, the study found poverty and home violence and HIV/AIDS as lead factors. This finding is in agreement with Ahmadu (2009) who found out that the deteriorating economic conditions of the country hinder access to education. Again Ekekwe (2008) was of the opinion that in most cases of sick parents of HIV/AIDS, female children are most vulnerable because they are quickly withdrawn from school to take care of their sick parents or younger siblings and these girls grow up to be future women. In lamenting the dangers of poor access to education UNESCO (2005) stated that many developing countries may have difficulty in providing basic education to its citizenry due to high poverty rate.

Also, the study found out that majority of the Nigerian citizens exhibit negative attitude towards women education. This negative attitude is rooted in the age-long cultural beliefs about male child supremacy over the girl-children. This corroborates Han (2012) who in his view stated that some inimical attitudes of society towards the education of their girl children include discrimination (based on gender); reluctance to send girl children to schools on the premise that education and schooling may have corrupting influences on them. Girls are perceived to be homely and hence should be domestically-minded and as such should receive only training geared towards domestic responsibilities which has no connection with tertiary education.

The study also discovered that poor women's access to education has led to many women lacking skills or training needed for some appointment or employment. Any position or employment has some basic requirements which the occupant must possess. There are basic entry qualifications/traits for any position of authority. However, such qualifications/competences can only be acquired via education. As such when such trainings are not obtained due to lack of or poor quality education, competence becomes in doubt.

Among the remedies to poor women access to education is that of subsidization of the cost of education. Section 11, paragraph 108 of the National Policy on education (2004) recognized that education is an expensive social service and as such requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of government. However, in Nigeria, at present, the sole responsibility of provision of education (tertiary) lies on parents or the individuals. The cost of education is gradually rising beyond the reach of an average Nigerian parent. This makes the issue of subsidization of the cost of education imperative. This is due to the prevailing harsh economic situation in the country. Furthermore, significant relationship was found between societal attitude towards women and their access to tertiary education.

## 10. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended.

1. There is need for adequate orientation by government agencies, youth clubs, non-governmental agencies about the importance of education to all citizens which includes women.
2. Poverty was a causative factor of poor women access to tertiary education; hence government should create job opportunities, encourage small scale businesses and entrepreneurship to reduce poverty level.
3. There is need for the government to abolish or review some of the age-long cultural and traditional practices which tend to hinder equal access to education for both genders.
4. There is need for attitudinal change on the part of Nigerian citizens to encourage women access to tertiary education.

## 11. Conclusion

The study delved into factors are responsible for poor access of women to tertiary institutions in Bende LGA. The study was expedient considering the role and importance of education in the overall development of any individual and nation. Based on the findings of the study, it was gathered that some of the factors that influence women access to tertiary education include poverty, early marriages, home violence and HIV/AIDS. Some of the identified remedies to low women access to tertiary education in Bende LGA are subsidization of cost of education, abolition of harmful cultural and traditional practices among others.

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