

Conjugal Family: A Platform for Women Education and Aspiration for Political Leadership

Fasiku Adesola Mercy

Department of Social Studies, College of Education,

Ikere- Ekiti, Ekiti State.

Abstract

Women in any society occupy a very prominent position and they are saddled with some responsibilities which when properly managed will contribute immensely to nation- building. Knowledge, as it is often said, is power and can be acquired through education. The relevance of women in the society depends on the level of education they have attained. Women have been marginalized from taking leading positions in politics due to their low level of education. It has been brought to the fore that just as the natal family is quite important as it performs crucial roles in the childhood education, the conjugal family which eventually houses a girl child as a wife and mother should also perform important roles in the furtherance of women education where a girl child stopped her education abruptly either because of early marriage or other circumstances beyond her control. It is argued that conjugal family should not be the final destination that will bring a stop to girl child her educational advancement. Additionally, husbands have the responsibility to sharpen their wives for leadership roles politically and should be ready to release them accordingly without suspicion. The research methodology is termed qualitative research with the use of secondary data gathered from the libraries such as newsprints, textbooks and journals. Also, the theoretical perspective of feminism exposes inequality and oppression as explanation for frustrations experienced by women. The paper explored thematic methods on approaching issues in. This paper has, among other things, considered that irrespective of the marital status, a woman can still further her education, efforts shall be made to examine woman education, evaluate the role of conjugal family in women education, women and politics, challenges and the way forward.

Keywords: Women, Politics, Conjugal family, Education, Natal family, Leadership

Introduction

Every society, whether simple or complex has its own system of training and educating its youths. Education for the good of all has been one of the most persistent concerns of men throughout history (Fafunwa 2004). One of the responsibilities of any viable government is to provide a basic education for its entire citizen and the most recognized legacy that parents can give their children is education. This brings about the concern for women education with the aim of underscoring their capacity to enable them make their expected contributions to themselves and their society. According to Fafunwa (2004), an educated man is the one who is mentally and physically well-balanced. It was concluded that African society regarded education as a means to an end and not an end in itself as it emphasized social responsibility, job orientation, political participation and spiritual and moral values.

Early marriage has been conceived in so many quarters as a major factor militating against women education and their urge for further education. This paper has, among other things, considered that irrespective of the marital status, a woman can still forward her education. It has been brought to the fore that just as the natal family is quite important and perform crucial role in the girl childhood education, the conjugal family which eventually houses the girl child should also perform equal roles in furtherance of women education. A girl child should not be stopped her education abruptly either because of early marriage or other circumstances beyond her power. In the natal family, parent is responsible for the education of a girl child. But when the child attains maturity and legitimately marries, all these responsibilities and the relationship come to an end. Durkheim (1978) posit, that the child henceforth has his own personality, separate interests and finally live at the mercy of her husband in case of marriage under normal circumstances. The conjugal family which is headed by the husband (father) should take up the responsibility by sending his wife to school so as to complete her education in order to march up with her mates and become relevant in the society and perform her roles in the society as a mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer, socio-cultural and political activists. But it has been observed that some men were shirk in this responsibility to train their wives due to some reasons best known to them. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the role of conjugal family in women education and aspiration for political leadership.

Conceptual Issues

Education

Authors have defined education in various ways and each definition reflects the environment and their perspectives. Dopemu and Igwe (1977) sees education as the enlightenment, creation of awareness, appreciation of self and social values, doctrines, philosophies, norms, belief as well as the development of self such that one can be most beneficial and productive to both self and society at large. Ayeni (2011) on his own sees education as an effective and dynamic instrument for molding and harnessing the human person and its capabilities and also for restructuring a better society. From the above, it could be deduced that education is a way by which a person acquire skill and knowledge either through formal or non-formal medium with the readiness to be influenced by the skill and knowledge acquired and thereby make him a useful person to himself and his society.

Every individual needs education so as to hand on the cultural values and behavioural patterns of the society to its young and potential members. Education is also needed so as to enhance new inventions and discoveries and to adequately inform those willing to initiate social and technological change. Nigeria national policy on education has done much as it has as one of its five major aims to develop. Obiaqwu (2004) sees education as life-long process learning and acquiring information and skills that starts from infancy to the day one dies. Despite the fact that education is for all, women still remain at disadvantage in many areas of life which includes education, employment, health and civil right. According to the U.S Agency for International Development and the World Bank, 57 percentages of the 72 million primary school aged children who do not attend school are females. In addition, girls are four percent less likely than boys to complete primary schools (Gender Statistics 2010). It is obvious that girl child are less likely to access school or remain in school and achieve in education. According to Uzoma (2013) that woman make up to two thirds of the adults who are illiterate and girls who do enrolls in school may have irregular attendance due to other demands on them, many a times they do repeat classes for years, fail key subjects and finally drop out. All these gender inequality in education has great impact on the provision and the content of education. Hence there need to examine women education and address problem associated with it. That is to say it is a continuous exercise which has no age limit.

Abur (2001) sees education as a tool used for integration of an individual into the society so that he can achieve self realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress. The universal declaration of human rights in 1948 as slated in Obiagwu (2001) states that everyone has right to education

Natal Family and Women Education

When a girl child is born into a family, the life, disposition and the influence of the family go a long way to form such a child. Formal and non-formal education expected to be instilled in the child takes place in the natal family which midwife him into the world. The natal family comprises of the father, mother and the children. Each of the children relates with his siblings as they all equally put their parents before them as pacesetters. The natal family as an agent of socialization imbibes and inculcates into the child the values and norms of the society in which he is expected to live as he grows to adulthood. The issue of discrimination is as conceived by the parent, (mother and father) and when this is avoided against a girl child, her capacity for education is easily formed and developed. Parents therefore have a lot to do to disabuse the mind of a girl child against their cultural and erroneous belief that investment in a girl child is a waste. The belief that a girl child will eventually end up in the kitchen of a man totally outside her natal family or that she will not be around to carry on the name of her natal family is contemporarily out of tune. Apart from informal education, parent should try as much as possible to train their girl child before allowing them to marry, not minding the belief that they will use what they have to enrich their husband.

Conjugal Family

Eventually a girl child of yesterday becomes an adult, a spinster and automatically becomes a wife. The marriage she contracted, with every readiness to consummate her home, is a clear beginning of a conjugal family. Clearly, conjugal family comprises of husband and wife newly wedded to start up their life. While the newly wedded husband and wife will refer to their home as conjugal family, with a child born to their home, natal family is formed. According to Emile (1978) conjugal family is the result of a contraction of the paternal family which consists of the father, mother and all generational descendants from them except for daughters and their descendant. It is a nuclear family consisting of a married couple and their children (by birth or by

adoption who are unmarried and underage). When we critically look at the functions it only cover protection and care of the young ones, regulation and control of sex impulses, conservation and transmission of sexual heritage, one could see that the training of the wife is excluded. A husband will definitely do himself good when he puts every effort in place to develop his wife educationally either to match up his status or for economic reason to raise their standard of living. In this regard women who enjoy the co-operation of her husband will not find it difficult to undergo further education in their conjugal home. We see traces of complexities in our society today as a result of incompatibility which end so many families or leads to home separation and divorce in the century in families that exhibit wide gap in terms of education between husband and wife but as years roll back, you see such gap closing up and thereby enhance the capacity of such women to raise up their head anywhere they find themselves politically. An uneducated woman will either be bag carrier or local market women mobilizer without a representative capacity and as such the goodies in the political arena will then be eluding her. The husband as well as the children has a lot of role to play in helping their wife and mother respectively to come up in creating a conducive environment to make it easy to develop her. There had been instances where some husbands have decided to release their slots to their wife when invited to take up some political appointment or the other. A very good example is Chief Bayode of Ikere community in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Conjugal Family and Women Education

Married women and adult education are intertwined. A girl child who missed the opportunity at the initial stage to be educated can still be encouraged. The nature and the readiness of the husband as well as the size of the family are very crucial in this respect. A lady who shows enthusiasm for formal education or advancement in her studies no doubt will have much impact in her family. Adult classes are organized and contemporarily are all over the places. It is therefore suggested that a woman who long for formal or further education must have weaned her children very well and keep a sizeable family to avoid much disturbances. In this regard, the husband must see the need to help his wife to further her education in order to make her more relevant in the family and the society at large.

Women Education and Erroneous Notions

Gender disparity has been with us for long. This is unconnected with the traditional beliefs that are held against the women folk. Despite various policies, our women still suffer from unnecessary discrimination. This must be a major concern to all well meaning citizens and the government now that we have a growing democracy. The effect of women has not been well felt compared with their male counterpart. Ezeali (2001) concluded that education has been one of the major factors militating against female effectiveness.

The global neglect of women education has been long. This in itself has generated a lot of discrimination against women from the early stage of life to adulthood. The reason for this is not unconnected to the wrong and bad notion that a girl will eventually make her final destination into another family. This observation concurs with the opinion of Tahir in Isa (2005) that the girl child is denied education because she is considered a poor investment for the future since she is destined to marry outside the family. These fundamental rights and needs are thus left inadequately catered for or totally denied.

Nigeria national policy on education has done much as it has objectives touching on building just an egalitarian society, a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens which when vigorously pursued will in no doubt encourage women emancipation and position in the society. The fundamental right to be educated has indeed spurred actions towards making education compulsory as all progressive enrolment of school age children have improved. This trend continued until 1970's when enrolment and literacy rate dropped as a result of the economic crisis (Isa, 2005). This negative trend badly affected the girls' child as a result of some peculiar obstacles staring the girl child education in the face. UNICEF (2003) identified some obstacles to women education. These are:-

- Policy and management factor
- Cost factor
- Cultural factor
- School based problems

However, in the Nigerian context, especially in the southwest Nigeria, the education of the girl-child is somehow seen as less important and consequently considered as a waste of time and resources. Girls are basically trained for their motherhood roles (Oniye, 2009).

From 2009 Nigeria Education data survey showed that some 1.5millions children 8.1% of children aged (6-14) who were enrolled and were not found in school at the time of survey. According to the data 53% of those not in schools were girls. Adegbesan (2007) revealed that at least 26.1% of females had no formal education in south west.

The table below shows the national summary of primary school enrolment statistics (2004-2008) as used in Karim (2014)

Year	Male enrolment	Female enrolment
2004	11,824,494	9,571,016
2005	12,189,073	9,926,359
2006	12,575,689	10,441,435
2007	11,683,503	9,948,567
2008	11,483,943	9,810,575

Source: British Council Nigeria (2012)

The table above shows that the gross enrolment ratio of girls is still significantly lower than that of boys in Nigeria primary schools and it can also be deduced that the number of girl child that attended school was low compared with male child and this will no doubt affect their social, economic and political life. More importantly, it can affect their participation in politics in that only the learned and more exposed women can participate fully in politics both at state and federal level (Fasiku, 2017).

Common Causes of Slump in Women Education

According to Obinna (2007), the followings are the common causes of slump in girl child education in the society;

- **Culture:** There are some cultural practices that militate against girl child education. These include girl child marriages, which over the years have denied several girl children the opportunity to acquire formal education or to drop out half way. Previous reports has shown that early marriages, teenage pregnancies, gender inequalities in society contribute to poor scholastic performance and force girls to drop out of school (Howley, Leslie, Ross and Schmalz 2000). Similarly, there is a belief that girls do not need formal education and are deprived of the opportunity for skilled work.

- **Poverty:** Parental economic poverty is blamed as a major cause of girl child non education. Today, poverty and HIV pandemic – the greatest crisis in the world and its inadequate global response have their greatest impact on children, especially girls. However, although poverty has a role to play, one can comfortably say that non-girl child education is also a cause of poverty. So they are intertwined in an unholy circle causing and perpetuating each other.
- **Cultural Indoctrination:** Many children are culturally indoctrinated and made to believe that education western type – is not needed and thus advised to run their lives without it. Girls are made to believe that their place of fulfilment is in their husbands home and since education (to them) is not needed to marry nor make babies, they should focus just on getting the right man, accepting the parent's choice and making such a man happy. This level of indoctrination has made all girl children focus on marrying rather than studying. Thus, even the few that are privileged to go to school cannot wait for the right time, so whenever the man arrives, they drop out of school.
- **Deficiency of Educational Infrastructures:** Absence of standard learning centers, deficiency of qualified teachers and drought of study materials have over the years prevented the few lucky girl-children, allowed to acquire formal education from obtaining quality education. Majority leave school worse than when they entered. Also the gender biased educational processes, including teachers' attitudes, curricula, educational materials, and practices reinforce gender inequalities (Howley et al 2000). Furthermore, the absence of female teachers as role models may inhibit the enrolment of girls.
- **Fear of Sexual Harassment and Molestation:** Parents and guardians deny their girl children access to schools because of their fear of sexual molestations of all kinds. Also their lack of trust on these innocent child make them prevent them from attending such schools, since they are not sure what 'evils' they will get involved in. The fact that majority of teachers are males have not helped issues at all.
- **Child Exploitation:** This is the commonest cause for denial of girl child education. Child labour keeps girls out of school, whether in the home as house workers, caretakers of younger siblings, or in the workforce (Howley et al 2000). It is not uncommon to see girls, who ought to be in schools hawking several wares and consumables during school

hours along the roads and streets. They are also seen in farms during school hours helping their parents' plant, weed or harvest farm produce. At home they act as nurse maids for their mothers taking care of the little ones or preparing meals for the whole family.

Other challenges of Women Education:

- Straight jacketed roles/define roles/certain for women
- Female inferiority complex
- Poor educational investment
- Religion and home background
- Marriage, once marriage is entered into, it marks the end of women education in so many cases.

Women Education and Politics

Gender disparity has been with us for long. This is not unconnected with the traditional beliefs that are held against the women folk. Despite various policies, our women still suffer from unnecessary discrimination. This must be a major concern to all well-meaning citizen and government now that we have a growing democracy. The impact of women has not been well felt compared with their male counterpart.

Ezeali (2001) concluded that education has been one of the major factors militating against female effectiveness. Despite the fact that everyone as a citizen of a country has the right to education, it was recorded that yet sixty-three percent (63%) of women have not obtained that right. There is great disparity between male and female education, women and girls do not participate in school like boys and men. This has great influence on women participation in politics. As early as the colonial era, the marginalization of women has been the standard practice in Nigeria's patriarchal political system until 1976, women were not even to vote in Northern Nigeria, their women have been marginalized politically up to the fourth republic. The negligible presence of women in institutionalized politics is equally apparent in their low participation as party executives, elected officers and political appointees. This is not unconnected with their low level of education. Recent trends in women's political participation in Sierra Leone have been very encouraging though there is still a long way to go to increase women's roles. In the 2002 elections, women represented 49.6 percent of the total number of registered voters and the only

female candidate was Zainab Banguru to presidential office, however she failed to win enough vote to gain a seat in the parliament but a significant feat has been recorded in Liberia where we now have a woman-former president in Sirleaf Ellen Johnson for the first time in African sub region. In the current legislature, women constitute just 14.5 percent of all parliamentarians, 21 government cabinet ministers and 10 deputy ministers, only 6 are women though women make up majority of voters and they participate in significant number in party campaigns and rallies, very few hold party posts. To have the right peg in the right hole, the background of a would-be leader will be considered. In this respect, only a handful of our women that are educated and exposed are considered. This has also affected the affirmative campaign currently invoked globally. In some societies, the more exposed a lady is, the higher the presumption of unchastity in her favour. Women therefore have a lot to contend with in their bid and struggle for recognizable participation.

Challenges to Women in Politics

Although in the recent time, there have been some improvements, women's political participation and leadership continues to be an issue of concern to all, as their ambitions are being shifted by political leaders and majority of the population. Based on statistics, women remain largely underrepresented in the political arena and are persistently excluded from the exercise of power for particular reasons.

Specifically, there is a kind of political will by the government and by political parties to promote women right and involve women in the political process. In the elections of 2002, most political parties agreed to implement a newly advocated 30% quota for women on their lists. A number of challenges and barriers are encountered by Nigerian women in politics. The exclusion of women in political processes in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial era when they were forced to give off many of their political right. It should also be mentioned that Nigeria has not created a comprehensive legislative frame work securing quotas in political parties and national elections for women. Another factor is the impact of money politics, the cost of engaging in electoral politics remains too high and leads to the exclusion of mass women from the election processes.

- Patriarchal attitudes although not directly in immediate families all the time, but certainly among political parties.

- Lack of substantive women movement and cohesiveness among women groups that claim supposedly women's political participations,
- Lack of strong mandate and real power of the ministry of women affairs.
- Lack of meaningful support from donors.

Above all, the education of women cannot be realized fully in political life of a nation when they depend on others with sound educational background or on men leadership. More than two third of women are illiterates in Nigeria and the illiterate ones need order to function well in the society. Education empowers women to handle responsibilities as citizens of their societies and enables them to make more informed choices (Fordham 1990).

Now the major bedrock is the responsibility of the natal family of the girl child to her education and where parent have little or no money, they pay more attention to boy's education than girls because they believe that boys are to take after the name of the family and expected to earn money to finance family needs, most girls are left to do the domestic chores, help out to their parents in their trades, some of them are involved in child labour or housemaid. Some lure their girl child into premature marriage only few of them manage to have primary and secondary education, it is then left for the conjugal family to fill the gaps. After the girl child might have left her natal family to consummate her conjugal family, it then becomes the responsibility of the husband to sponsor and continue the education of the wife. Some of the educated homes we have today were as a result of the cooperation that transpired between the wife and the husband but where this is absent, the woman definitely becomes a full housewife and such cannot contribute in politics meaningfully. The few women that are in politics are those that have educational background and had probably furthered their education at the mercy of the full support of their husband.

Conclusion

Women have made substantial feat in that, they have towered as professors, ministers, parliamentarian, successful business tycoon and the rest. The percentage of these successful women is however low against the background of the population of the women folk when compared with men. This is not unconnected with the fact that women are culturally discriminated against with the resultant effect of low investment in women education. This paper advanced that, marriage should not be the graveyard (destination) for married women who are

still interested in education. Their spouses must be encouraged to develop them as this can enhance their capacity to contribute their quota to their immediate family and the society at large. The recommendations outlined above are ways to forward women education, which if acceded to by our policy makers will definitely improve women education.

The Way Forward for Women Education

The following suggestions have been made for the improvement of women education as to affect their participation in politics.

- Parents and men generally should possess the right attitude and have a considerable change of mind to enable equality of education opportunities for boys and girls, men and women in the society.
- Poor parent should be exempted from paying school fees, free school uniform, textbooks should be provided for the girl child to make the education totally free.
- Women should be motivated in order to make out time having interest and mark out time in their lives for education in order to gain access to knowledge and information.
- Married men should be involved in the struggle for women's equality and improvement in the education sector and functional literacy and accept to shoulder the responsibility of training their wives in post-secondary schools. to be conducted to educate the public on the importance of the right to vote an
- Massive sensitization in favour of women political rights has been and continued d of increasing women's political position.
- There must be a strong political will and a growing women involvement, political party commitment, the adoption of electoral quotas and reserved seats and sustained mobilization can make the difference.
- Affirmative action such as vigorous campaign for girls' education and Strengthening the capacity of women already in decision making positions could also lead to positive outputs in women access to political leadership.
- Also girl child should be encouraged to go to school before entering into marriage.
- Woman should also try to help themselves in term of finances in sponsoring their own education even after marriage

- There should be manageable age for girl child so as to give them change to further their education.

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