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## PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE EDUCATION OF NIGERIAN WOMEN

MRS. E.A. EMEKE

### ABSTRACT

This paper brings together under one umbrella many of the psychological factors that have been found to affect the education of women especially in Nigeria. The paper looks at factors that are inherent in and relate to the psychology of the Nigerian woman. The writer used the Focus Group Discussion method, and reports here ten psychological issues which must be taken into consideration. These are attitude, motivation, perception, sensitivity, intelligence, confirmation of capacity to learn, self doubt, self involvement, fear of consequences of success and feelings of inferiority.

Certain questions were raised for further research, and the conclusion zeroed in on the need for therapeutic interventions that will support the woman's ego strengths, help her focus more clearly on realities, thus encouraging thoughtful independence. It is the achievement of the latter that will enable her participate more meaningfully in education and achieve maximally.

### INTRODUCTION

Improving and expanding access to education has been a major goal of educational policies since the last two decades or so, in most third world countries (Nigeria inclusive). Many have come to know and firmly believe that education improves health and productivity. This knowledge and belief has led many women societies and organizations, individuals, government, funding organizations, and even men organizations - to take a closer look at women's education in Nigeria. Literature on women education generally reveals that the focus has been mainly in the areas of historical perspective (Awe, 1989, 1990; Remero, 1988); parental factors (Osinulu, 1990), the school environment (Eshiwani, 1983; Okeke, 1990); enrolment



and attrition figure (Alele-Williams, 1988; Oluwole, 1990), gender stereotyping (Duncan, 1989; Abe, 1985; Eienstein, 1984), etc. There has been few or almost no work done in Nigeria focusing on the psychological issues involved in the education of the Nigerian women, their effects, and the remedies. Hence, this paper attempts to take a look at this issue.

## WOMEN EDUCATION

It is a known fact that women make a major contribution to the economic production of their communities, and assume primary responsibilities for the health, socialization and well-being of their families. There can be no societal transformation without their involvement, support, and leadership. From this perspective, Education is the modus operandum to prepare women for an expanded scope of participation, and a more dynamic role as agents of change. By women education, we do not mean only formal education, though this is basic and should be made compulsory. However, education in the realm of commerce, vocational skills industry, etc must not be overlooked and must be given to those who may never be able to have Western type of formal education. By women education we also mean all forms of education which involve the female gender, either alongside with men, or as a single homogenous group. That education should be the one that gives the woman increased intellectual knowledge, that helps her to think better and to know more accurately, that enables the woman to behave more humanely, that makes men less pompous, that alter power relationship within institutions, and between the sexes.

In other words, the education should be an amalgam of intellectual, psychological and social interplays.

### Some Psychological Considerations

1. Attitude: There is a universal negative attitude to women and consequently women education by all of men, the society in general and women themselves. There is a traditional rating of female status as a step below male status in

every part of the world. Part of the reason hinges on basic biological and physiological attributes. But more importantly are certain erroneous beliefs which go to affect attitude concerning women. Three of such ones will be mentioned here. It is generally believed in Nigeria that:

i) Boys are superior to girls and so should be given better and higher education. This issue of superiority is carried ridiculously far. For example, in some studies (Maccoby, 1970; Omerod, 1973; Jacklin, 1975; Jehoda, 1979; Kelly, 1981), undertaken to investigate the reasons for girls' under-representation and underachievement in science and technology; the exponents of biological determinism believe that females:

a) are not endowed genetically with the skills and traits necessary for good performance in science;

b) do not possess analytical and visual spatial abilities.

ii) Since boys and not the girls will ensure the continuity of the lineage line, then a lot more should be invested in them academically.

What a tluce ? Things are fast changing in Nigeria and if the current practice continues, there will be no real lineage again in Nigeria. The vogue now is for a young father to make his own first name the children's surname. So, if he is John Malkik, and he is called Mr. Malkik, his children unlike the old practice to be called Stella and Samson Malkik for example, will be called Stella and Samson John respectively. Samson also grows up and registers his child at Theophilus Samson. So, where then is the lineage? Why must people allow a sentimental thing affect their attitude to and actual practice of women education.

iii) Since boys will eventually become household heads while girls would be just dependents, then boys should be better equipped educationally. Are girls (women) really dependants these days ? Men look forward to women's financial help and support for the family upkeep. In fact Nigerian young men nowadays openly declare that they will never get married to girls who will be to them; liabilities'. If this is the situation, then girls must

be equipped educationally so that they can measure up to the expectations of men who do not want to marry "liabilities".

It is relieving to note that women themselves are no longer interested in playing the second fiddle. they now consider it insulting to look up to their husbands for every little need either for themselves, their children or their extended family. There is however still a need to change some tints of negative attitude towards education in women themselves. This negative attitude in context of good to school affected women enrolment in the past as evidenced from Table 1.

Table 1:

Comparative Enrolment of Boys and Girls between  
1962 and 1947 in Nigerian Schools

YEAR	BOYS	GIRLS
1962	252	154
1872	1,043	802
1881	1,310	947
1947	325,000	65,000

SOURCE: Adapted from: Awe, 1990 -

Quoted in - "Historical Patterns Customs and Traditions Restricting Access of Girls to Education."

*Paper presented at workshop on "Constraints to Female Education in Nigeria" organized by Federal Ministry of Education and the World Bank.*

The pattern has changed only slightly even to date. Table 2 gives us an insight.

As mentioned above, attitude has got to change. Men, the society in general and women themselves have got to know and believe that women can achieve, that what a man can do, a woman can do also, that there is

nothing inherently or genetically inappropriate or defective in the make up of women to hamper their education, their attainment and achievement, or their rise to higher levels. Women have got to know that they are endowed just as men and their talents as well, as potentials should just be equally tapped. Women should not only seek opportunity or access to education, they should seek their opportunity on an equal basis with men.

Table 2:

YEAR	MF	F	%F
80/81	13,760,033	5,970,244	43.39
81/82	14,311,789	6,180,810	42.98
82/83	14,676,608	6,321,715	43.10
83/84	14,383,487	6,331,658	44.00
84/85	13,025,287	5,768,791	44.30
85/86	12,914,870	5,723,318	44.40
87	11,540,178	5,091,570	43.50
88	12,225,337	5,899,923	48.26

Source: Statistics Branch, Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, 1989.

MF = Male and Female

F = Female

2. Perception: Perception basically refers to the process by which becomes aware ((of changes) through the senses of sight, hearing etc.) In perception, stimuli are registered. Guided by previous learning and experiences, by verbal directions and by other cues, a person comes to

perception and learns a picture of how he is viewed. Pitched against this background, women have come to have a negative perception of

1 themselves, since the society is always telling them they are nonentities. This situation is even made worse when one considers anthropological studies (Patrick, 1985) which reveal that the women's perception is decidedly quick. Nigerian women have thus come to perceive themselves as under achievers, and this has affected their participation in education.

But this must not be. Women need to have a positive view of themselves as achievers. They must never think that they cannot make it. That some vocations, school subjects or professions belong to the male species. They must resist the impression given them by society that they are "bread eaters" and not "bread winners". They should make use of auto-suggestion technique (a psychological technique) in which they tell themselves every day that they can make it; that they have been created to achieve, that they are endowed to contribute their own quota academically, vocationally, scientifically and technologically to human development. Nigerian Women should resist the picture painted of them in films, novels, theatre plays, etc. as being evil in themselves, as sources of trouble, as perpetrators of evil and such like views.

3. Sensitivity: Women are highly sensitive. This high level of sensitivity affect them in education. Men in business, education, commerce, industry, etc. have shown and still show open and undisguised hostility towards women. The high level of sensitivity has made women more often than not to abandon competition with men, for they cannot stand insult, mockery, derision or any other form of hostility. Before they know it and rather unconsciously they leave the realm of achievement and progress to men, nonetheless commensurating with themselves at the background that they have taken such a defeating step.

4. Motivation: Motivation which may be externally or internally generated has been found to be a necessary reinforcement to learning and

achievement. A woman loves to be motivated, not necessarily with concrete objects, but at least in terms of being appreciated and being given commendation. Many of the women involved in our focus discussion group mentioned earlier by this writer pointed to this psychological issue. But what does the reality present? A sad scenario of motivation almost at the zero level. The woman is hardly motivated. The derogatory utterances by the society do not serve as incentives for the woman, the non-consideration of her tripartite roles of wife, mother and worker placed on her by her biology and society in assessment of her achievement does not motivate the woman. Given all these roles, she is still rated on the same scale as the man who carries half her burden, and in most cases she has not been found wanting but all the same she is derided and unappreciated.

*The women in our focus discussion group advocated that the time has come, when assessment of achievement should be based on ACTUAL man-hour of input as against the present practice of global measure of time and achievement. What they are saying is that in a situation where workers are supposed to stay put in 50 hours of work, a woman may be able to put in only 35 hours of work, with the other hours genuinely taken over by her attendance to other necessary and society imposed duties such as taken a child to the hospital, attending antenatal clinic, taking immunization for children, etc. Then the assessment of her achievement should be an expression of the percentage of her Actual hours of input, not the overall expected 50 hours in the example taken above.*

**5. Intelligence:** A woman (probably like any other human being), needs to know that she has intelligence. An interview conducted by Rich (1979) brings this point more to focus. She reported that "every woman regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought, and she needs to know it right away. Perhaps men learn this lesson before going to school, or perhaps they can wait until they have proved themselves to hear it, we do not know. We do know that many of the women we interviewed had not yet

they will not "go off their heads". They are afraid of divorce and/or separation. These are the problems that go in the psyche of the Nigerian woman. In frustration and unconsciously, she does not want to participate fully in education and stretch herself to the farthest in achieving and excelling in her field of endeavour.

It is interesting to note that the picture painted above cuts across all the different categories of women involved in the Focus Discussion Groups, i.e. the academically qualified professional women, the rural vocational women, and girls in secondary schools. This picture may partly account for the low level of participation of women at higher levels of education as well as academically oriented professional jobs. Tables 3-5 may make explicit the point we have just made.

10. Feelings of Inferiority: In our culture, women seems to regard themselves as inferior. Perhaps they want to have sympathy, perhaps it is a genuine feeling, or perhaps it is imposed upon them by men. It is however there and this affects their education. The new "freedom" has not done away with it, the "Better Life" programs and their likes have not completely eliminated this feeling.

The women most of the time feel that what they do outside the home is supplementary to the work of men. At the same breath they resent this feeling. They do not want to be seen as the malfunctioning half of the population. To this extent, they have an unresolved conflict which hinders their progress in education.

#### For Further Research

That women in Nigeria at present are getting education than it was a decade or two ago is not in dispute. But certain questions still need be raised.

1. Has education really made the women to feel and act emancipated ?
2. Is the bulk of education still not toward, the traditional role of women - with emphasis on such things as home economics, art and craft, garri

making, child care, food preservation, textile and fashion designing, etc. Education can be counter-productive if the content simply or overly reinforces traditional roles, at a time when women themselves are seeking to take on new roles.

3. Have women themselves realized through their education that the division of labour often amounts to economic exploitation of the female labour even when this is disguised under different colourful forms ?

4. Have women through education become more aware of the inhibition which hinder them from taking leadership roles in many aspects of daily life?

5. Has education helped women realize that they have to withstand discrimination ?

The male gender, the government, educational institutions, the society and women themselves have to take a close look at some of the questions raised above, as well as some other salient issues brought to fore in this paper. It is only by so doing and seeking honest answers that the education of women in Nigeria can be made to ascend a quantitative, but better still, a qualitative pedestal.

### Conclusion

The intent of women education is to remove barriers which present females from reaching their full potential, whether such barriers are located in the school, the individual psyche, or discriminatory labour practices. This view is also supported by Byrne (1979).

In conclusion, mere theories on the low participation of women in the field of education, or more exhortation to women to rise up, meet up with the men or be in the forefront of education will not do. Programs that focus on the psyche of the woman with the aim of using the maximum benefit to positive aspects, as well as changing the "warped" aspects will be the major answer. It is only through interventions that are therapeutic in nature that the best in the woman can be brought out, only through this can she



I feel truly emancipated and genuinely ready to launch out into the realm of education. It is only then that the picture of dearth of women in academics, commerce, the professions, etc, that we have now can change.

More researches should be carried out into the psychology of the Nigerian woman as it affects her education. Women studies and women programs should make more use of psychologists, guidance counsellors and such allied educators.

Women cannot be said to have overcome the "identity factor". Thus they need to be helped through therapeutic psychological interventions in their search for identity. Having suffered severe psychological degradation in the past, they need to be helped to attain psychological stability. None should doubt the educational value as well as the lasting effect of such an intervention.

There is need for counselling procedures which tend to support the woman's ego, strengths, help her to focus more clearly on realities, and to explore their possibilities thus encouraging thoughtful independence.

Table 3:

Percent of Nigerian Secondary Schools' Final Year Students  
that are Females 1978/79 - 1981/82.

YEAR	MF	F	%F
78/79	165,329	57,609	34.85
79/80	212,855	71,575	33.63
80/81	227,152	74,920	30.21
81/82	227,079	83,398	36.73

Secondary Schools include Grammar/Commercial Schools, Technical and Vocational Schools and Grade II Colleges. Figures represent Total of available data from States.

source: Derived data from Kafaru 1988 and Blue Print on Women Education in Nigeria 1989.

Table 4:

Trend in gender Participation in University Education in Nigeria

1971-1986.

YEAR	MF	F	%F
71/72	17,093	2,632	14.20
72/73	20,889	3,591	14.80
73/74	23,228	3,591	15.50
74/75	26,448	4,346	16.40
75/76 - 79/80	Data not available		
80/81	77,791	17,099	22.00
81/82	90,751	20,386	22.50
82/83	104,774	25,219	24.10
83/84	116,822	26,587	22.80
84/85	126,285	28,739	22.80
85/86	135,283	32,540	24.00

Source: NUC Annual Reports and Statistical Digest.

Table 5:

Percent of Women workers in Traditional Men's Job.

Occupation	Female %
Architects	5.0
Surveyors	4.0
Chemists	3.9
Engineers	2.7
Mining and Quarrying	1.4
Total	16.9

Source: Adapted from National Manpower Board, Nigeria's Manpower Requirements, 1984, pp. 19-26.

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