

IMPACTFUL WOMEN EDUCATION IN POST-COVID-19 ERA FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women's education is crucial for national development. It is a key factor in alleviating poverty and fostering economic growth. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted women's education, affecting enrollment, retention, and completion rates in schools. This paper discusses the importance of women's education in the post-COVID-19 era and its role in national development. Using secondary data from online literature and print publications, the paper concludes that impactful women's education can be achieved through several strategies. These include adequate funding to fully implement gender policies, employing women teachers, providing social protections such as bursaries and scholarships, developing mass education centers, establishing more educational institutions, ensuring secure educational environments, and re-orienting societal values.

Keywords: COVID-19, Impactful Women Education,
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Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a transmissible illness caused by a newly identified virus. This pandemic disease, characterized by severe acute respiratory syndrome, spreads through respiratory tracts such as the mouth and nostrils and affects the human respiratory system (Danso, 2020). As of March 28, 2020, COVID-19 impacted more than 1.6 billion children, youth, men, and women, disrupting education in 161 countries, including Nigeria. Nearly all states in Nigeria faced threats due to the rapid spread of the virus. To address the challenges posed by COVID-19, Ogunode, Ahaotu, and Ayisa (2021) noted that the pandemic affected educational systems globally. Education, as a system, comprises various sub-systems such as educational planning, administration, management, financing, and curriculum development. Educational planning is crucial for development and implementation, and Ogunode (2020) emphasized that all educational institutions, including those focusing on women's education, were affected. According to Sarkinfada and Ogunode (2023), women's education is organized to empower women through formal or informal training. It represents a specialized form of education aimed at the holistic development of women through structured instruction. This paper will discuss the concept of women's education, the impact of COVID-19 on this sector, and strategies to enhance women's education to better contribute to national development.

Concept of Women Education

Women's education is regarded as the knowledge provided to women to enhance their self-respect and dignity. This education can take various forms, including formal, non-formal, and informal education, as well as adult education, community development, workshops, seminars, conferences, and training. The goal of women's education is to foster economic independence and self-reliance (Allison, 2022). Women, as mothers, serve as educators within their families, passing on their knowledge to their children and future generations (Osuata, 1987; Allison, 2022).

Education for women is considered a development priority due to the significant potential of educated women. The primary objectives of women's education are:

1. To enable women to improve their family's health and diet.
2. To enhance women's productive abilities, thereby raising their families' standard of living.
3. To provide women with access to appropriate technologies, cooperative management, and loan facilities.
4. To improve women's social and cultural status.
5. To enable women to fulfill their responsibilities more effectively (UNESCO).
6. To help women overcome their fears and feelings of inadequacy or inferiority.
7. To educate women in all aspects of development—mental, social, physical, psychological, religious, and economic.
8. To ensure women participate fully in national affairs and contribute to sustainable development.
9. To empower women to meet their basic societal needs, such as food, shelter, fuel, clothes, and nurturing.
10. To contribute to nation-building through economic and human development (Adamu, Aud, Allison, 2022).

Concept of National Development

A nation is a group of people living in a particular country, forming a single political and economic unit. It can also refer to a large number of people who share the same history, ancestors, culture, and interests. When something is described as national, it belongs to that particular nation.

National development refers to the advancement of people in all aspects of life within their country. It primarily involves economic growth, which is a technical process emphasizing capital-intensive facilities and high levels of technical expertise (Costa, in Allison, 2022). National development is defined in terms of both economic and human development (Olusanya, in Allison, 2022).

Economic development includes:

- a. Natural resource endowment
- b. Industrial and technological advancement
- c. Income per capita (average income of individuals in the country)
- d. Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- e. Gross National Product (GNP)

- f. Government sources of revenue
- g. Human development encompasses:
- h. Social development
- i. Values and cultures and their impact on human interaction
- j. Standard of living (high or low)
- k. Cost of living and income utility
- l. Literacy levels
- m. Family sizes
- n. Dependency rates
- o. Dietary habits
- p. Level of interaction

Impact of COVID-19 on Women Education

COVID-19 significantly impacted teaching and learning across various educational levels, affecting girls and women particularly in tertiary institutions, secondary schools, basic education, and mass education centers. For higher education, Ogunode (2020c) found that the pandemic led to the suspension of the academic calendar, a halt in research programs, and the cessation of community service activities. At the secondary school level, Ogunode (2020a) reported that school closures disrupted the academic programs of Senior Secondary Schools, suspended internal and external examinations, reduced investment in education, and halted teaching and learning. The academic calendar was also significantly impacted.

In basic education, studies by Ogunode and Jegede (2021), Osiesi (2021), and Gupta and Gopiani (2020) indicated that teaching programs, internal examinations, and extracurricular activities were suspended, academic programs were disrupted, and enrollment in primary schools was negatively affected. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that, as of March 30, 87% of the world's students—approximately 1.5 billion learners—were affected by school closures. While most affected students were in primary and secondary schools, pre-primary and tertiary education levels were also disrupted, with a significant number of these students being girls and women.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the pandemic exacerbated existing gender inequalities, with girls and young women being the first to leave school, the least likely to learn from home, and the last to return to the classroom. In Nigeria, girls from rural areas, particularly in the north and among the poorest in society, constituted a large proportion of out-of-school children. Studies by Ogunode and Kolo (2021), Ogunode, Ndubuisi, and Obi-E (2021), Ogunode and Ndubuisi (2021), and UNICEF (2022) concluded that COVID-19 adversely affected the enrollment, retention, and completion rates for girls and women in Nigeria.

Reposition Women Education for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

Increment in funding of women education, full implementation of gender policies, employment of women teachers, provision of social protection (bursary and scholarship), development of mass education Centres and establishment of more educational institutions, provision of a secured educational institutions and re-orientation of Value.

Increment in Funding of Women Education

The major problem in women education development is shortage of funds. One of the most serious problems threatening the survival of the women educational systems is that of dwindling level of public funding and poor investment in the sector. This shortage of funds affected implementation of policies and programme. Women education cannot perform optimally without funding. Women education drives its allocation from the general education budget which have been described by Ogunode and Onyekachi, (2021) and British Council (2014) as inadequate to sustain development in education. Nigerian investments on education have not met the recommendation of the UNESCO of 15%-20% of the annual national budget for about a decade now. Ogunode, Onyekachi, and Ayoko, (2023); Ogunode, Attah, and Ebute (2023) and UNICEF, (2022) study's showed budgetary allocation for the education sector from 2010-2021 below.

Table 1

Nigeria Education Spending - Historical Data		
Year	Education Spending (% of GDP)	Annual Change
2021	5.14%	0.01%
2020	5.13%	-0.72%
2019	5.86%	-0.09%
2018	5.94%	-0.18%
2017	6.12%	-0.53%
2016	6.65%	-2.60%
2015	9.26%	0.22%
2014	9.04%	0.36%
2013	8.68%	0.13%
2012	8.55%	0.67%
2011	7.88%	1.71%
2010	6.17%	1.71%

Source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NGA/nigeria/education-spending>

From the table 1.1 above, it is clear that of Nigerian education spending for education revealed that from 2021, 2022, 2019,2018,2017,2016,2015,2014,2013,2012,2011 and 2010 the education spending in GDP percentage had 5.14%,5.13%,5.86%,5.94%,6.12%,6.65%,9.26%,9.04%,8.68%,8.55%,7.88% and 6.17%. The inability of the Nigerian government to objectively accept and implement the 15% to 20% funding formula for education recommended by the UNESCO impact negatively on the performance and sustainability of women education. Thus, it has become obvious that Nigeria's neglect of the funding formula is detrimental to women education development.

Poor investment in women's education in Nigeria has significantly contributed to gender imbalance within Nigerian educational institutions, particularly universities. A critical issue is the inadequate funding allocated for programs and policies intended to promote women's education. Musa (2019) highlighted that this poor investment is a major factor hindering the development of women's educational programs in Nigeria. Dada, Ogunode, and Ajayi (2022) found that the government's failure to adequately fund female education has resulted in the underrepresentation of women in leadership

positions within Nigerian universities. Ogunode and Salman (2023), Ogunode, Lawan, and Yusuf (2021), as well as Adamu (n.d.), argue that only substantial investment in women's education can facilitate transformation and drive national development.

Investing in women's education is economically advantageous and essential for a country's growth. It is one of the most effective ways to promote national development. Educating girls and women not only boosts economic growth but also reduces social disparities. Women with higher educational qualifications are more likely to secure formal wage employment compared to those with only primary education (NPC, 2009; British Council, 2014).

Full Implementation of Gender Policies

Full implementation of gender policies across all educational institutions in Nigeria is crucial for strengthening women's education. The inadequate enforcement of gender policies has led to poor representation of women in various aspects of the educational system. Specifically, the ineffective implementation of gender policies regarding admissions has resulted in gender imbalances in university enrollments. Similarly, the poor enforcement of gender policies on recruitment has resulted in a predominance of males among university staff, while the under implementation of gender policies in appointments has given men a disproportionate share of leadership positions in universities.

Ogunode and Ahmed (2021) and Ogunode, Ahmed, and Yahaya (2021) observed that one significant reason women have not fully benefited from planning and development efforts is their inadequate representation, which is linked to the non-implementation of gender policies in Nigeria. Many gender policies designed to ensure equality in recruitment are poorly implemented in higher institutions. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2006) and Ogunode (2020) have noted that the failure of various government institutions to enforce gender policies in both public and private institutions is a major factor in the persistent gender inequality in Nigeria's public institutions.

Furthermore, British Council (2014) and Ogunode, Lawan, and Yusuf (2021) concluded that the poor implementation of the Child Rights Act, passed at the federal level in 2003, has contributed to gender inequality in schools. This act, which is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, underscores the rights of every child to survival, development, protection, and participation. It envisions the child as both an individual and a member of a family and community, emphasizing the need for robust policy implementation to achieve true gender equality in education.

Unfortunately, the appraisal of the rights on the average Nigerian child remains pitiable. Empirical evidence on the number of out-of-school children, the victims of terrorism as well as those with deplorably low nutritional status and others who suffer from various forms of abuse, over the decades, supports our deep concern. It is heart-warming that 34 out of the 36 federating states in Nigeria have domesticated the Child Rights Act. That Kano and Zamfara States are yet to do the needful speaks volumes about the scant regard their political leaders have for children's rights.

For instance, as at May, 2022, about 18.5 million children, 60 per cent of whom were girls, did not have access to education in Nigeria. The revelation came from Rahama Farah, the head of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office in Kano. She added that the numerous attacks on schools by jihadists and criminal gangs up the north had particularly harmed the children's education. That the frightening figure jumped sharply from 10.5 million in 2021 should trouble the hearts of the governors of the states yet to domesticate the Child Rights Act. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), about 20 million children are currently out of school in the country.

Employment of Women Teachers

To reposition women's education for sustainable development, it is crucial to increase the number of female professional teachers in educational institutions across Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria. The low representation of female teachers has negatively impacted the development of women's education. Many young girls and women feel uncomfortable in institutions dominated by males, which discourages their participation and contributes to the establishment of women's continuing education centers (Sarkinfa & Hussaini, 2023). Furthermore, issues such as mistrust due to concerns about sexual harassment also affect parental and spousal support for such institutions.

Despite an increase of 287,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools from 1999 to 2009, less than half of the teaching staff are female, with only 48% and 46% in primary and secondary schools, respectively. This disparity perpetuates barriers to girls' enrollment and retention. Countries with significant gender disparities in enrollment often lack sufficient women teachers. Although the proportion of female teachers at the primary level in Nigeria has remained unchanged since 1999, there has been a 10% increase at the secondary level (UNESCO, 2014). Women teachers serve as positive role models and mentors, facilitating girls' clubs and encouraging girls in their education and personal growth.

Where there is a lack of female teachers or female representation on School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs), critical decisions regarding girls' schooling may be compromised. Research indicates that schools with higher numbers of female teachers tend to exhibit better gender parity in attendance, progression, and attainment (ActionAid, 2012). British Council (2014) found that increased female teacher representation correlates with improved gender parity in enrollment and completion rates. Effective training, deployment, and motivation schemes are essential for placing the best teachers, especially female teachers, in marginalized communities. Combining advocacy with action to address these challenges is vital for improving girls' and women's education, particularly in rural areas where female role models are most needed.

Provision of Social Protection

To achieve the goals of women's education in Nigeria in the post-COVID-19 era, it is essential to provide social protection measures, such as bursaries and scholarships, for girls and female students across all educational levels. This approach will enhance enrollment, retention, and completion rates for women's education in Nigeria.

Literature indicates that significant costs deter parents from enrolling their daughters in school and push girls out of the educational system. Research highlights the negative impact of financial charges on girls' attendance and progress. For instance, as household wealth increases, net attendance rates for girls improve, revealing a strong correlation between school attendance and income. Recent studies show that 46% of girls who left school did so for economic reasons.

Educational institutions in Northern Nigeria impose various formal and informal charges, including registration fees, examination fees, contributions to parent-teacher associations, and costs for infrastructure and sports equipment. These costs can consume up to three-quarters of household expenditure (NPC, 2011; British Council, 2014). Inability to cover these costs may lead to severe consequences, such as exclusion from exams, sending students home, or girls missing classes to work and earn money for schooling (ActionAid, 2011; British Council, 2014).

The financial burden of schooling often pushes children out of school, while poverty and employment expectations further discourage parents from supporting education. With over 60% of Nigerians living on less than US\$1 per day, many girls are forced into work, including market trading or street vending. UNICEF (2004) estimates that 15 million children work full-time in Nigeria, the majority of whom are girls from Northern States. These children often undertake poorly paid jobs, such as domestic help or petty trading, to contribute to their families' income.

Providing bursaries and scholarships for girls and women in educational institutions is crucial for sustaining the development of women's education in Nigeria. Reducing or eliminating educational costs for impoverished families has been shown to significantly improve girls' enrollment, retention, and completion rates. Costs can be both direct, such as school fees and levies, and indirect, including expenses for school materials and food. The government can address these challenges through various social protection interventions, such as conditional grants, school feeding programs, stipends, conditional cash transfers, and targeted subsidies. Properly implemented, these measures can effectively increase attendance and progression rates among disadvantaged groups, including girls and women. For instance, conditional cash transfers in Latin America have been successful in overcoming socio-economic barriers to girls' education, such as domestic work and child labor.

Development of Mass Education Centres and Establishment of More Educational Institutions

There is an urgent need to enhance mass education centers and establish additional educational institutions across Nigeria to provide more opportunities for girls and women in rural areas to access quality education. Expanding educational opportunities for girls and women translates to greater socio-economic development for the country. Studies have shown that many mass education centers across Nigeria suffer from inadequate facilities, including a lack of modern laboratories and libraries. Sarkinfada (2013) also noted a shortage of educational institutions nationwide, contributing to high numbers of out-of-school children and admission crises in tertiary institutions. These issues have significantly hindered the development of women's education programs in Nigeria.

The education sector faces numerous challenges, including equitable access, quality, and management. Although the total number of children enrolled in primary schools increased from 17.9 million in 1999 to 20.7 million in 2011 (UNESCO, 2014), data reveal significant disparities in enrollment, retention, completion, and literacy rates by gender. Many girls and women struggle to transition to senior secondary schools and tertiary institutions due to a lack of nearby schools, long distances, inadequate learning materials, and a shortage of teachers. Insufficient facilities at the secondary education level can prematurely end girls' education. The low levels of transition and retention among girls in secondary schools are concerning, as they impede the acquisition of essential life skills such as literacy and numeracy.

Increasing access to education for women and girls by providing more school facilities will contribute to national development in economic, health, and technological sectors (Sarkinfa & Rabo, 2022).

Provision of a Secured Educational Institutions

Provision of a secured educational institutions for girls and women will guarantee development of women education. A secured environment is the only thing that can ensure delivery of quality education at all levels of education. There are many forms of insecurity in the Nigerian educational system and this has affected development of women education in the country. For instance, in 2014, Boko Haram abducted 200 school girls from the north-eastern town of Chibok, several schools have been targeted in similar mass abductions. In 2021, about 1,500 students were kidnapped by armed men, according to UNICEF. As at June, 2022, nearly 290,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), including 223,072 children were reached with integrated primary health care services in IDP camps and host communities, according to UNICEF Nigeria Humanitarian Situation Report. Bullying, harassment, corporal punishment and discrimination in and around schools have serious negative impacts on girls' and women education. Unequal gendered relations of power are a root cause of safety and security problems. Many Girls and women complain of sexual and psychological harassment and physical punishments, including caning for the girls from male teachers and boys in school. Inadequate school infrastructure, such as a lack of school fences and remote, unsuitable toilets, can contribute to increasing the risk of violence for girls and women (Action Aid, 2011) report how insecurity has affected girls and women education in Northern. Access to quality women education will lead to national development, Sarkinfada, and Hussaini (2019) and British Council (2014) noted educated women are less likely to die in childbirth and more likely to have healthy and well-nourished children than their non-educated counterparts. We know this. A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five. In Nigeria 66% mothers with secondary education give birth in a health facility compared to 11% with no education (British Council, 2012).

Re-orientation of Value

Using social media to reorient the masses about the importance of women's education in Nigeria is crucial. There are numerous barriers to women's education in the country, such as patriarchal practices, cultural beliefs, early marriage, and stereotypes, that urgently need addressing to enhance women's educational opportunities. The National Gender Policy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2006) highlights how

patriarchal culture has significantly infringed upon women's rights, the socialization of children, and development practices. Such norms have contributed to increased violence against women, early marriages, harmful traditional practices, and other gender-based issues.

Sarkinfada (2019) emphasizes that culture is a critical factor in understanding gender ideology in Nigerian society, which is largely patriarchal. Men dominate various aspects of women's lives, and media—particularly radio—can play a powerful role in influencing community attitudes and advocating for girls' and women's education. In Nigeria, the radio is a widely used source of information. Studies show that 98% of respondents carry radios to farms or grazing areas and listen to both local and international news. Radio is preferred due to its accessibility compared to television and newspapers, which face issues like unreliable electricity and limited supply in rural areas.

Reorienting the masses through social media and other media channels can help break down barriers to women's education and promote national development. Sarkinfada (2016; 2020) notes that education equips women with vital knowledge related to health, including emergency care, minor ailments treatment, immunization, family planning, and child health care. Increasing awareness and education about these benefits through social media can facilitate greater acceptance and support for women's education, leading to broader social and economic development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper examined the impact of women's education in Nigeria during the post-COVID-19 era and its significance for sustainable national development. The analysis revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected women's education, particularly in terms of enrollment, retention, and completion rates. To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of women's education, the paper recommends several strategies. These include increasing funding for women's education, fully implementing gender policies, hiring more female teachers, providing social protections such as bursaries and scholarships, developing mass education centers, establishing more educational institutions, ensuring the security of educational environments, and reorienting societal values. Adopting these measures can help realize a more impactful women's education system in Nigeria and contribute to sustainable national development.

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