

Psychological Disposition and Cultural Constraints to Female Participation in Higher Education: A Study of Selected University Women

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Abstract. In Europe, America and Latin America, statistics show that the ratio of girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels of education are proportionate. In Nigeria, this is not the case, but rather, female participation in education is usually more pathetic in the so-called unfeminine fields. Yet, females constitute approximately fifty percent of the country's population. The present study is an exploration of cultural factors and the disposition of women in Nigerian Universities, to some selected factor. The findings revealed that there are many constraints in the academic path of many females and that most of them were trained for the home roles.

1. Introduction

The home plays an important role in the socialisation process of a child. What parents approve or do not approve of any sex depends on the social and cultural milieu in which the family lives. Hoffman (1977) asserted that parents tend to socialise their sons for the father occupational role and their daughters for the mother role.

Many females are believed to perceive education in the western form as a waste of time. Thus when a child is to be sacrificed for another to move educationally as a result of financial incapability of the parents, it is more often than not, a girl that will be sacrificed. Further, a girl's time is taken up by household tasks such as trading than attending to school work because school assignment is not on the agenda. For the adult woman, who might be burdened by her

role as a mother, over-burdened by domestic labour and household chores, she might be left with little time and energy to pursue higher education certificate. Many women, especially the brilliant ones also usually tend to want to hide their brilliancy because of fear of rejection by their male folks and society. Fear of success leads to inhibitions in career and education. Homer (1968), hypothesised that women with this disposition are always anxious and defensive. However, it can be assumed that females who are not plagued by fear of success will not be inhibited in professions and educational achievement.

The school as a socialising agent equally play a significant role in socialising females away from high achievement, especially by their hidden curriculum. Other socialising agents that equally psychologize females away even if not directly include the mass-media especially too in its hidden curriculum.

It must be noted that the tendency among women to shy away from higher education is not peculiar to Nigeria. For example, Ironside (1982) noted that in America, in spite of equal opportunities in the country, the position of women in academic appears to have changed very little over the past several decades. Ironside went on to note that women as a group earn fewer doctorates than men and that the fundamental barriers to this tendency are the result of differential socialisation among men and women.

2. The Relationship Between Culture, Psychological Disposition and Level of Education Attainment

Kirkpatrick (1936) researched into attitude towards feminism. He investigated differences between college students and their parental attitude towards feminism. He designed a questionnaire to represent some categories of issue like social status, domestic issues and economic issues. The economic category consisted primarily of issues concerning professional training, working conditions and pay for women. He reported in his finding that the students subjects in the study scored higher than their parents on the economics categories and that this could be due to the higher educational status attained by the students rather than a social trend favourable towards feminism. This implies a subtle limitation on women and where they can go.

Brown, Perry and Harbough (1977) asserted that "Traditional" women derive their basic satisfactions and sense of identify from the wife and mother roles, feelings that the women's role is subordinate. Non-traditional women, who may be favourably disposed to women's participation in higher education were said to have considered maximisation of their own potential equally as important as family duties and acknowledged their need for individual achievement. Their sample of women consisted of 253 black and white women living in Detroit, Michigan. Their findings also indicated that the women became significantly less traditional as their educational level become higher. Vanfossen (1977) equally reported that level of education was positively associated with the sex values. Rogers (1984) found a positive relationship between women's perception of their sex role and their level of achievement, implying educational achievement.

Holt (1979) made the observation that women were under-represented in many sector of American Society, Walum (1976) (in O'Leary, 1977) reported that twenty five females Ph.D. holders were able to do so because they had strong identification with some female model. Spear (1978) also reported a tendency in females

to achieve highly only when they have role models.

Eschbach cited in Lund, (1994) stated that women's problems at higher level of education participation are still with us and also noted the tendency for women in co-educational institutions to becoming academically and socially isolated. Equally, Dines cited in Lund, (1994), said such discrimination could be ascribed to history and believes that discrimination will continue as long as culture stereotype persist. The author equally noted that though enrolment is on the increase in culture stereotype persist. The author equally noted that though enrolment is on the increase in higher levels of education, it is still in female subjects.

Differential expectations are often placed on girls and boys even in the school. Girls are expected to excel in the arts, at reading language and verbal fluency while boys are expected to excel in the sciences, mathematics, manipulation of spatial relations, judgement task, and to be mechanically inclined (Boocook, 1975.; Weitsman, 1972). In furtherance of the stereotypical curriculum, seventh-grade girls are regularly channelled into a year of home economics including a semester of cooking and a semester of sewing while boys are channelled into a year of industrial arts, including a series of three or four-shops, such as wood, metal, electric and graphic arts. This situation "channels" children's future vocational decisions by teaching them there are appropriate occupational roles for males and females" (West side women's committee report in O'Leary, 1976).

The above situation can be said to be similar to what takes place within the Nigerian setting, where home-management or home economics and food and nutrition are taken by girls , carpentry, woodwork and technical drawing are taken more by boys . notwithstanding the national policy on education specifications , girls are encouraged to offer subjects such as Home Economics, or Arts subject. If she is bright, she is told "You will not find a husband-oh" (Nwagbara, 1985). Thus, almost from the time girls enter school, they appear to restrict the

range of occupations open to them. Usually when girls are asked “What do you want to become when you grow up? They choose either to be a nurse or to be a teacher. It is interesting to find that several girls may respond that they would be mother, whereas most boys would not say they would be fathers. Girls at all ages between nine and seventeen also choose lower ranking occupations than boys of the same age. Wirtenberg and Nakumura (1976) went on to note, that:

The net result of all this is that by the time they finish their formal education (in most cases high school, few cases college) there are gross differences in the expectations, and preparation that women and men have for their life work. (p.166)

This explains the psychological disposition of females to education and why many shy away from participation at the higher echelons of the education ladder.

3. The Purpose of Study

The present study aims at finding answers to the following questions:

- (i) What type of training was given to the subjects under study in their childhood and adolescent years?
- (ii) What was the initial career choice of female lecturers under study?
- (iii) What are the academic constraints faced by the subjects under study? And
- (iv) How were they handled?

4. Methods

The research used the descriptive survey method, while the sample consisted of female

lecturers, and undergraduates who were on part-time course in the selected universities, either because they were combining studies with a paid job or home-making. The lecturer had at least the master degree. While some were on the Ph.D. programme, others had completed theirs. The respondents were randomly selected from universities in the eastern, western and northern part of the country. The total number for student was 318 while it was 325 for lecturers. Those who did not respond to some items were left out for analysis purpose for those items.

4.1 Instrument

An investigator designed questionnaire was used to elicit required information. The instruments were first tested. In this instance, the first draft of the questionnaire was given out to forty female undergraduates and lecturers, who were like the subjects for the present study in many respects. Varied options were given to them to respond to and it was from observed responses that the present items on the questionnaire were used, because the items rated among the highest ticked during the pilot test. Psychometric experts agreed to the face validity of the instrument.

Scoring Procedure

The respondents were required to tick as it relates to them appropriately. Frequency counts was used to calculate responses for each item, and the chi-squares was equally made use of.

5. Results

The results of the study as to what the subject under study were trained for principally in their childhood and adolescent years are on Table 1.

Table 1: Childhood/Adolescent Training of Female Undergraduates and Lecturers in the Study.

Group	Student	%	Academic	%	Total
Career Prospects	61	19.2	122	54.2	183
Family Prospects	208	65.4	56	24.8	264
Both family and career	49	15.4	47	21	96
Total	318	100	225	100	543

As revealed in Table 1, most (54.2%) of the lecturers claimed they were trained for career prospects, while some (21%) claimed they were

trained for both family and career prospects. Some other (24.8%) claimed to have been trained solely for family responsibilities. The

analysis for the students revealed that most (65.4%) believed they were trained for family prospects, some (19.2%) claimed they were trained for career while others (15.5%) claimed they were trained for both career and the family. The chi-square statistics was computed for the distribution in table 1 to test for significant x-

value of 94.3 which is greater than the table value of 5.9 for 2 df was obtained. This shows that the difference between the number of those trained for career prospects and others is significant and that academics differ significantly from the students in this regard.

Table 2: Initial Career choice of female lecturers in sample

Group	Frequency	A	F	Percentage
Teaching	144	32	46	59.8
Medicine/Nursing	38	12	9	15.8
Pharmacy	11	7	2	4.6
Law	7	0	4	2.9
Engineering	6	3	1	2.5
Other Professions	35	1	2	14.4
Total	241			100

Most of the academics had teaching as their first choice of career. One hundred and forty-four (59.8%) of the women identified teaching, while thirty eight (15.8%) chose medicine or nursing. Profession chosen by others include pharmacy, engineering and others. It was interesting to find that many of the women had decided to go into teaching career before their university education

their academic goals, the major reasons given by both groups related to finance, while the lecturers identified also, thesis supervision etc. The summary is given in table 3.

Academic Constraints of female Undergraduates and Academics

Table 3: Academic constraints of females in the sample

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Students		
Finance	187	56.7
No interest at first	91	27.6
Marriage	52	15.7
Total	330	100

On the type of constraints the female undergraduates and lecturers faced in achieving

Lecturers

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Finance	71	51
Thesis supervision problem	48	27.1
Antagonism for husband/relations	37	20.9
Having to combine academic goals and family responsibilities	21	11.9
Total	117	100

The researcher went a step further to find out how the female lecturers handled their particular constraints. The results is in table 4.

Humility to all	21	11.3
Total	186	100

Handling of constraints among female lecturers

Group	Frequency	Percentage
Took things easy/cool	59	31.7
Restored to prayer and belief in God	43	23.1
Hard work	36	19.4
More determined	27	14.5

As could be observed from table 4, many of the respondent (31.7%), claimed they decided to take thing easy. Some (23.1%) said they resorted to prayers. Others claimed they become more determined and worked harder. Many who faced antagonism from husband or relations claimed they had to resort to humbling themselves so as to be more acceptable to all.

6. Discussion

As can be observed from the result, cultural norms and expectations still hold for many females in the study. It is revealing that this is more prominent among the female students than among the female lecturers and significantly so too. More of the female lecturers claimed to have been trained for the career prospects, this could have aided them towards desired goals without or with little exhibition of fear of success.

As to the career choice of the females, it is revealing that most opted for the teaching profession. This may be because of the societal perception that it is the profession that allows for taking care of the home after office hours. Those who claimed to have preferred the teaching profession to the other professions were in the majority and only among those who preferred pharmacy was there preponderance towards androgynous behaviour.

As to the constraints faced by the females a major factor among the students was finance, while most equally said they had no interest at all first and that was why they went into paid employment before enrolling for their first degree or why they married first. The female lecturers on their own part equally identified finance as a major constraint and supervision of thesis.

Supervision problems especially (among the doctoral groups) was another major constraints. The fact that husbands and relations were antagonistic further revealed societal attitude to female participation in higher education.

The investigator further asked the lecturers to identify how they coped with identified constraints as this could be path-finding for many female, and a high proportion observed that they took things easy with cool head. Many also said they took to hard work and determination.

From the above, it could be seen that it is necessary to train females early in life for future work roles as well as the home roles. As in every other thing, to succeed too in higher education,

taking into cognisance constraints that may be in the way, it is necessary to have a cool head, to have faith in oneself as well as in God and to be hardworking and determined. No doubt, problems not envisaged could always arise, but when one has internalised the above attitude, one is on the way to solving such problems.

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