# EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE, 1882 – 1960

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**Abstract**

Education can be viewed from two perspectives: informal education (traditional) and formal education (Western). The focus of this paper is the latter. Prior to colonial rule, African societies educated their indigenes. Many were hunters, farmers, sculptors, blacksmiths, and traders and so on. Women were not left behind; they took care of the homes as wives and mothers and were responsible for raising responsible children. In addition, they farmed to augment whatever the men brought to the table. They were involved in textile manufacturing; they wove most of the cloth used by family members. There was a clear division of labour along the gender divide. With the imposition of colonialism, there was a deliberate attempt by the intruders to destroy the existing knowledge and systems of indigenous African societies. Men were favoured in the new arrangement like it was done before colonial rule. Patriarchy obtained in most African societies, and this was further entrenched by the colonial rulers, thus relegating women to the background. Men were highly favoured in the colonial system of education. This paper using historical methodology that critically evaluate primary and secondary sources (DATA) looks at the educational policies and development in Nigeria in the period 1882-1960. It is divided into four parts. The first part looks at indigenous education in Africa; the second is an overview of educational legislation in the period under review. The third analyses educational development in Nigeria and

finally, the impact of the colonial educational policy on women. The paper finds out and concludes that the colonial education policy is largely responsible for the unequal access to opportunities for women.

**Introduction**

The interpretation of colonialism in Africa had favoured the narrative of political markers, and where politics has been exhausted, an economic interpretation follows, and these inevitably relegate gender to the background. However, a gendered interpretation of colonial history has been an endeavour that African and non-African scholars have been pursuing vigorously. The attempt is to frame an African colonial experience in a gendered perspective, this way the total experience of female and male indigenes can be properly appreciated. Ifi Amadiume pointed out that African women have been concerned with fundamental social issues of self-organization and the economy. This statement clearly reflects the nature of African women and their colonial experience. Chima Korieh for instance explained how women strategically contested economic and political power with the colonial administrators in his work "This Matter concerns women": Traditions and women's protest in colonial Eastern Nigeria"[1] Korieh explored the women's revolt of 1929 against colonial policy on taxation to trace the emergence of intellectual peasant movement. This movement he argued was because of popular consciousness among peasant women which was framed in strong moral cum ethical and feminine influence of their society.[2]

However, the fundamental changes colonialism brought to Nigeria's social structure can be appreciated by engaging in a critical evaluation of colonial policies on economy, politics, and education. Colonial policy on education specifically favoured the men in Nigeria, this appear to be the general case in colonial Africa. Gertrude Mianda examined colonial education in the Belgian Congo and observed that colonial education accorded men more privileges in the colonial system because they were the first to be educated.[3] Early missionary education in Nigeria followed the same pattern of male education over female education. When colonial education was introduced in northern Nigeria it was initially the "Sons of Chiefs" that were given the privileges to attend the schools. Southern Nigeria was not different. By 1921, Talbot noted that:

Education is, save for a few government schools carried out by Missions, which have been unable to supply enough really qualified teaches to meet the demand…thus…appointing school masters who are unfit for their positions…and engage boys of doubtful character and little training

who are entirely unsupervised…The principal educational institution in Nigeria-and, in fact, perhaps in the whole of West Africa- is the government secondary school at Lagos called King's College, which is the only one to prepare pupils for the British universities. Its scholars are generally the sons of chiefs or boys of ability who have obtained scholarships from other schools…[4]

Colonial education initiated the marginal role women assumed in post-colonial Africa. This can be argued from the view that the emerging African elites in colonial Nigeria were mostly men who had been educated in Britain and Nigeria. It was these men that were initially recruited into the colonial administration as civil and public servants. It also offered the men exclusive positions in the trade unions, therefore the narrative about the nationalist movements often tend to focus on the role of such male figures as Azikiwe, Kenneth Dike, and Herbert Macaulay among others. However, the role intellectual peasant women played, as well as the efforts of other women nationalists such as Funmilayo Kuti and Margaret Ekpo among others is beginning to gain current in Nationalist history.

This attempt explores colonial policy on education using the gender framework. It tries to capture how colonial policies on education undermined the status and role of women in the political and social sphere of colonial Nigeria. The essay analysed primary and secondary sources, such as a colonial document and published texts, and argues that though education engendered transformative possibilities in the colonial structure, the inability of the colonial government to properly engage women in the process, by not creating an enabling environment to effectively participate or compete with their male counterparts ensured they were disadvantaged in the colonial structure as well as the role emerging African elites played in the years preceding and succeeding decolonization.

**Conceptual Clarification**

This study will clarify concepts such as Educational Policies, Development and Gender as it has been used and interpreted in the context of this study.

**Educational Policies**

Educational Policies according to Harold consist of the principles and policy decisions that influence the field of education, as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems.[5] Harold further emphasize that Education governance may be

shared between the locals, state, and federal government at varying levels. According to Elizabeth, Florin and Corina, education takes place in many forms for many purposes through many institutions. Examples of such institutions may include early childhood education centers, kindergarten to 12th grade schools, two-and-four-year colleges or universities, graduate and professional education institutes, adult education establishments, and job-training schemes.[6]

**Development**

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.[7]

The international agenda began to focus on development beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. An understanding developed that economic growth did not necessarily lead to a rise in the level and quality of life for populations all over the world; there was a need to place an emphasis on specific policies that would channel resources and enable social and economic mobility for various layers of the population.[8]

Through the years, professionals and various researchers developed a number of definitions and emphases for the term "development." Amartya Sen, for example, developed the "capability approach," which defined development as a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability, through granting freedom of action, i.e., freedom of economic, social and family actions, etc. This approach became a basis for the measurement of development by the HDI (Human Development Index), which was developed by the UN Development Program (UNDP) in 1990. Martha Nussbaum developed the abilities approach in the field of gender and emphasized the empowerment of women as a development tool.[9]

Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that

intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality.[10]

Gender interacts with but is different from sex, which refers to the different biological and physiological characteristics of females, males and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. Gender and sex are related to but different from gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person's deeply felt, internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth. Gender influences people's experience of and access to healthcare. The way that health services are organized and provided can either limit or enable a person's access to healthcare information, support and services, and the outcome of those encounters. Health services should be affordable, accessible and acceptable to all, and they should be provided with quality, equity and dignity.[11]

Gender inequality and discrimination faced by women and girls puts their health and well-being at risk. Women and girls often face greater barriers than men and boys to accessing health information and services. These barriers include restrictions on mobility; lack of access to decision-making power; lower literacy rates; discriminatory attitudes of communities and healthcare providers; and lack of training and awareness amongst healthcare providers and health systems of the specific health needs and challenges of women and girls.[12]

**Research Methodology**

This paper relies mainly on secondary sources including publications from government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other collections which include documents, photographs. The study consulted relevant written literature which includes critical analysis of data from libraries, newspapers, books, journals and workshop papers, etc. All data generated were analysed using the analytical method of historical research. The choice of 1882 – 1960 has to do with the changes in the form of education from Pre-colonial era to Post-Colonial era. Prior to 1960, education specifically Western Education was provided by Missionaries who come to the Nigerian area for the purpose of evangelism example the Christian Missionary Society (CMS). They build missionary schools and run the affairs of the school. But by 1960, Nigeria gained independent and the was changed in the provision of education and the introduction of

governmental policies on education and the nationalisation of various missionary schools in the subsequent years.

From Indigenous African Education to Missionary Schools

Prior to the colonization of Africa, Africa had already established a concrete system of indigenous education and the way indigenous knowledge was transferred ensured that gender divides were rather complimentary than divisive. More so, Africa's pre-colonial education was different in content and intent. It was meant to be relevant to the African society. Walter Rodney argued that there was barely any demarcation between manual education and productive activity or any division between manual and intellectual education. Altogether through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well rounded personalities to fit into that society.[13]

Indigenous African education changed as African societies became more sophisticated; the transition to settled communities and emergence of communal society had some implication for indigenous education. Some aspects of African education could equally be classified as informal and formal (that is there was a specific programme and a conscious division between teachers and pupils).[14] Formal education in pre-colonial African was also directly connected with the purposes of the society it was restricted to certain periods in the life of every individual, notably the period of initiation or coming of age. Formal education was also available at later stages in life, such as the passing from one age grade to another or of joining a new brotherhood. Specialized functions such as hunting, organizing religious ritual and the practice of medicine involved formal education within the family or clan. Apart from hunting and religion, the division of labour made it necessary to create guilds for passing down the techniques of ironmaking, ironworking, leather making, cloth manufacture, pottery, moulding and professional trading.[15]

**A Historical Overview of Educational Legislation in Nigeria1882-1959**

Starting from 1882, Britain started legislating education laws to guide her education policy in Nigeria. *The 1882 Education Ordinance* marked the first legislation on education in Nigeria and the British West Africa Generally.[16] The ordinance prescribed award of grant for high performance and for subjects, annual evaluation of pupils, methods of granting teachers' certificates, a system of grant-in-aid, and the establishment of a General Board of Education with the power to establish

local boards. The ordinance also recommended that one-third of the salary of the inspector of schools for the Gold Coast should be paid by the Lagos colony. Lagos and the Gold Coast were jointly administered. However, in 1886, Lagos and Gold Coast Colony were separated this necessitated a review of the 1882 Education ordinance.

The *1887 Education Ordinance* was specifically for the Nigeria (Southern) Colony. The Ordinance among others prescribed an Education Board, a standard examination and classification of teachers' certificates.[17] *The 1916 Education Ordinance* was necessitated by the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate into one administrative unit. It was the result of Lord Lugard's effort to cater to the whole country's educational needs. The ordinance paved way for increased financial participation by Government, full cooperation between the government and the missions and asserted government's firm control over education. The Amended Ordinance No. 8 of 1919 gave more powers to the inspector by allowing them to inspect any school, whether assisted or non-assisted and also empowered the Education Board, upon the recommendation of inspectors, to close nonperforming schools.[18]

It should be noted that at this point, education in Northern Nigeria was making inroads. Although the British administration did not grant a request by the missionaries to establish schools in Kano by 1919, yet there was concerted effort to introduce western education in the Northern part of Nigeria.

**The 1926 Education Ordinance**

In March 1925, a memorandum on Education Policy in British Tropical Africa was dispatched to the colonies as the basis for the British colonial education. This was because of the recommendations that emerged from the 1920 Phelps – Stoke Commission on Education in Africa. This memorandum had far reaching consequences for women education, part of the memorandum that specifically focused on women is reproduced, below:

Education Policy in British Tropical Africa, Memorandum submitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies

P*resented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, March* 1925.

**Education of Girls and Women**

It is obvious that better education of native girls and women in Tropical Africa is urgently needed, but it is almost impossible to over-state the delicacy and difficulties of the problem. Much has already been done, some of it wise, some of it—as we now see—unwise. More should be done at once (not least in regard to the teaching of personal and Domestic hygiene), but only those who are intimately acquainted with the needs of each Colony and, while experienced in using the power of education, are also aware of the subtlety of its social reactions, can judge what it is wise to attempt in each of the different Dependencies.

We are impressed by the fact that mere generalisations on the subject are not needed and may be misleading. Regarding the education of its girls and women, Tropical Africa presents not one problem, but many. Differences in breed and in tribal 'tradition should guide the judgment of those who must decide that it is prudent to attempt,

(a) Clever boys, for whom higher education is expedient, must be able to look forward to being educated mates.

(*b)* The high rate of infant mortality in Africa, and the unhygienic conditions which are widely prevalent make instruction in hygiene and public health, in the care of the sick and the treatment of simple diseases, in child welfare and in domestic economy, and the care of the home, among the first essentials, and these, wherever possible, should be taught by well qualified women teachers,

(c) Side by side with the extension of elementary education for children, there should go enlargement of educational opportunities for adult women as well as for adult men. Otherwise, there may be a breach between the generations, the children losing much that the old traditions might have given them, and the representatives of the latter becoming estranged through their remoteness from the atmosphere of the new education.

To leave the women of a community untouched by most of the manifold influences which pour in through education, may have the effect either of breaking the natural ties between the generations or of hardening the old prejudices of the elder women. Education is a curse rather than a blessing if it makes women discontented or incompetent. But the real difficulty lies in imparting any kind of education which has not a disintegrating and unsettling effect upon the people of the country. The hope of grappling with this difficulty lies in the personality and outlook of the teachers. Female education is not an isolated problem but is an integral part of the whole question and cannot be separated from other aspects of it.[19]

What followed the memorandum was *the 1926 Education Ordinance*, which had a far-reaching consequence for women and girls' education in Nigeria; it particularly made provision for the education of women and girls. Other provisions included the adaptation of education to local conditions; Specifying the functions and duties of supervisors or mission school inspectors; and expanding and strengthening the existing Board of Education by including the Director and the Deputy Director of Education, the Assistant Director, ten representatives of the mission and other educational agencies, among others.[20]

*The 1948 Education Ordinance* decentralized educational administration. It created a Central Board of Education and four Regional Boards, that is, those of East, West, Lagos and North. It also recommended the establishment of Local Education Committees and Local Education Authorities. *The 1952 Education Ordinance* was introduced to enable each of the three newly created (Eastern, Western and Northern) regions to develop its educational policies and systems.

**The Regional Education Laws**

In 1954, Nigeria became a federation of three (i.e., Eastern, Western and Northern) regions and the Federal Territory of Lagos (which was the Federal capital) due to the adoption of the 1954 constitution. Each region had the power of making laws for its territory and citizens. The regions quickly exploited this constitutional provision and made regional laws. The outcome of this exercise was the Education Law of 1955 in Western Region, the Education Law of 1956 in Northern Region, and the Lagos Education Ordinance in 1957.

**The Ashby Report of 1959**

In 1959, with a measure of self-government and independence at sight, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), commissioned a report to find out strategies and solution to the manpower needs of Nigeria in the twentieth century. The commission was led by Sir Eric Ashby; it comprised three Nigerians, three Americans and three Britons. Some of the findings of the report among others included the imbalance in Nigeria's level of education among the regions, especially between the north and south, the parochial nature of Nigeria's education. Thus, the commission made recommendations as follows: expansion of primary and secondary education, upgrading of university college Ibadan to a University and establishment of three other universities at Nsukka, Ife and Zaria.[21]

**Analysis of Educational Development in Nigeria 1900-1960**

S. O. Osoba and A. Fajan demonstrated that missionary education in Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth century was seen as a means of proselytization, they argued that the missions had a very narrow view of education for Nigeria.[22] They noted that since that was the aim, they carried out this narrow objective by teaching children how to read, write and arithmetic, sufficient to ensure their operation. The idea was to produce enough interpreters who could preach in their native tongues. Indeed, missionary education was not geared towards any introduction of scientific or literary ideas. It was limited to the primary or basic schools.

Since this was the case, the missions were not interested in educating girls. Where schools for girls were established, it was for the wives or fiancés of their male workers. The most important thing taught at some of the few available girls' school were domestic education. Education was aimed at enshrining domestic and social norm and to produce a *woman of virtue.* British colonial system sought to expand education not because it was aimed at developing the colonies. For instance, T. N. Tamuno showed that:

…in 1906, John Holt proposed to the colonial office in Britain a reduction in the number of British civil servants in West Africa, thereby saving nearly half the money spent on giving them accommodation and demanded that West Africans be employed as much as possible...[23]

Educational development in Nigeria is grounded on colonial policy of exploitation. Ngozi Ojiakor explained that during in that era, women education was scanty thus depriving them of adequate participation in politics when the Indirect Rule system ended in 1951. Despite fighting gallantly against colonial policies of indirect rule through the warrant chiefs, the women who spearheaded the Aba Women's Riot in 1929, to protest the colonial policies, as well as in 1935, in Umahia; in Okigwe 1938, were not found worthy enough to hold positions because their education powers had been stripped over the years.[24]

In the Northern Province, the distorted nature of the British colonial policy on education was more felt. Before 1927, the north was mostly left untouched in terms of educational policy. This was because; education in Southern Nigeria was already leading to a level of awareness and militancy or resistance to colonial rule. Osoba and Fajana pointed out that the parochial and segregationist policy of Lugard in the north was aimed at ensuring that the North and the South do not have grounds for similarities thereby preserving the native institution with which Britain can continue to maintain her authority over the colony. They pointed out that by

1918; there were a total of 15 primary schools and industrial schools in the north that has a population of 9 million.[25] The implication of this development for northern women was that while the women in the south were getting a measure of western education, they were mostly held down by the tripartite and patriarchal policy of Islam, tradition, and colonial policies. It should be said that even Islam had been a source of education of women in the north especially in Koranic and Islamic jurisprudence.

As from 1927 when education was under the Kano Native Administration, a measure of improvement on girls' education was witnessed in line with the general improvement in education in the north.[226]

Adamu Mohammed Fika noted that education in north was hinged on three explanations; priority was to be given to intelligent natives of the *mallam* class who would be taught Roman characters for writing Hausa, colloquial English, and finally, reading and writing English, arithmetic and geography, so that they might qualify for clerkships in government and native administration offices and gradually replace native clerks who hitherto had been drawn from other West African colonies having western schools. Second, there was a need for some sort of special training for the ruling class likely to become chiefs and Emirs. Third, it was thought desirable to provide general elementary schools for children on a secular bias with industrial teaching in addition.

This policy had far reaching implication for girls' education. Girls were not in the Mallam class, neither were they trained to become emirs and chiefs in Hausa land. Therefore, by implementing this arrangement, girls were naturally excluded from education and by extension the colonial administration early on.

More so, missionaries were denied access into the Muslim parts of Northern Nigeria. There was a deliberate policy of pushing the missionaries to the fringe of Northern Nigeria. The idea was that the North will not be exposed to the secular ideas inherent in the Christian missionary education, which will in turn lead to a strong resistance against colonial policies as had been happening in the south. This had far reaching implication for women, as the pace of educational development in the north delays, so also was women education being stagnated.

It was not until 1930 that a girls' school was opened in Kano. Part of the reason for this delay was a result of the reluctance of the Northern chiefs to send their children to school, they were not convinced of the need to educate their girls in western school. In seeking alternatives for the girls' school, the British administration started with 11 girls who were daughters

of the British Native Police (*yandoka*). The first girls' school in Kano was called the "Girls Training Centre". Further expansion of girl's education was rather slow and uneven compared to the boys.[28]

**Reconsidering Colonial Education and its Impact on Women**

Since colonial education for women and girls was not commensurate in quality and in form with that provided for the boys, education as offered by the colonial and missionary system was rather an attempt to reinforce domesticity among African women. Colonial and missionary schools were basically aimed at spreading Christianity, European languages, and Western norms throughout Africa. The argument is that education socialized African women into European gender norms "appropriate" forms of social organization. This in turn narrowed the influence women had in traditional Nigerian society.

In some cases, the colonial administrators refused to offer women employment to some sensitive position, they were limited to secretarial jobs. Some of the reasons employed were that women were being protected from being sexually harassed by their male colleagues. This construction of femineity had far-reaching consequences for women. Evidence abound that such protectionism only served to bar women from the better paying jobs and, by implication, rendering them dependents of the same men from whom they were, supposedly, being protected in the first place.

The colonial economic policies undermined the status of women in Nigeria. In the agricultural sector, the introduction of "cash crops" and Palm oil mills economically undermined the women. While the educational policies and the recruitment of natives in the colonial administration further accentuated the marginalization of the women in the scheme of things.[29] The preference for recruiting men to civil service posts during much of the colonial period undermined women's status, while early colonial policies reflected the biases of the overwhelmingly male colonial administrators.

After World War II, the British colonial administration focused greater attention on the education of girls and women.[30] Melinda Adams noted that this increased attention to girls' and women's education was linked to the growth in the number of female colonial officers in the British administration. They were becoming telephonists, midwives, nurses, teachers, clerics, machine operators, wardresses, and receptionists. Although women's participation increased, it continued to lag significantly behind that of men.[31]

It should be said at this juncture that although colonial education

had a greater impact in undermining the status of women, the women were able to strategically use the tool education provided to further their interest. Some women demanded even the learning of more skills, sometimes, these demands were granted, at other times, they were ignored.[32]

Though nearly all missions and colonial governments diffused domestic ideologies, these ideologies varied in significance and affected women differently. Class, context, religion, and the colonial administration were all important variables that influenced how these ideologies affected specific women. In certain contexts, ideologies of domesticity were tempered by other policies that explicitly sought to increase women's participation in the public realm. Moreover, African women frequently subverted these domestic ideologies, taking what was useful and leaving the rest behind.

**Conclusion**

The unequal education of women in colonial Nigeria had a long-term effect. In the formal sector, women barely had space at the echelon, where they do, they had to work double compared to their male counterparts to achieve such positions. More so the social pressure grounded on tradition and creed was a major barrier to women education. Early marriage, domesticity, and the loss of economic power because of the distorted colonial economy reduced women to the base in the modern colonial economy. Interestingly, education at this time was neither the product of the social exigencies of the country nor rooted in the socio-cultural reality of Nigeria. Surprisingly, the overriding need to retain those already in the fold relegated secular education to the background. Along the same line, the educational system put in place was largely divorced from the life of the people especially women and emphasized aspects of education with little or no contribution to natural development. The colonial educational policies were the very bases upon which independent Nigerian state was founded. While in the South, concerted efforts were made to narrow the gender gap, in the North, very cheeky attention was paid to women education. Indeed, women explored the window education opened to participate actively in the colonial economy. The agency women displayed in ending colonialism through resistance to their policy and women involvement in nationalist movements indicated the strategic nature of women's engagement of the colonial structure.

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