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IMPORTANCE OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN NATION BUILDING: THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

Y. Aliyu, U. A. Ajidagba and J. Abdur-Rafiu

Abstract

Female education is one of the critical issues that had been relegated to the background in most of our communities. In fact, there is insinuation that Islam discourages female education. Thus, the aim of this paper was to refute the above insinuation and bring to a lime light, the importance of female education in nation building from Islamic perspective. In carrying so analytical method was employed. The researchers relied on printed and electronic materials. It was revealed that education is the light for all human beings - male and female and from Islamic perspective, what is good for men is generally good for women as well. The paper posited that females need to be educated as they also have their roles to play in national development. It was however recommended that female education need to be encouraged and promoted most especially among the Muslims. The erroneous belief held by some Muslims that Islam disallows female education should be discarded.

Keywords: Education, Female, Islam, Importance, Perspectives

Introduction

Female education is the type of upbringing of a female in a way that she would be useful to herself and society in general. Education for the girl becomes topical in the world over, probably because of the observed wide gap that exists when considering the rate at which their male counterparts are educated. Whereas, the general aim of education is not discriminatory in favour of any particular sex. For proper Islamic education to be facilitated, Muslim women need to have their input and this can be ensured when they are embraced right from the beginning. Salaudeen (2011) noted that the ignorance of some people about the stand of Islam on female education and the socio-cultural arrangement of some Muslim communities have been largely responsible for the unjustified lower enrolment education. Similarly, poverty and parents' economic status effect their interest and ability to provide for their children adequate equipment, materials and other logistics to facilitate their education.

Salaudeen (2011) further opined that the general behavioural pattern of female which, in his opinion, was alarming and which has also become a subject of concern to all stakeholders in the education industry and the influence of peer grouping are all inhibitory factors to Muslim female education. More so, cultural bias is said to have hindered the progress of women education. In general, the traditional attitude is that women are regarded as inferior to men. According to Boserup (1970) and Linton (1986), the roles and duties which a woman is expected to perform as a daughter, a wife and mother affect her pursuit of education. This paper therefore aims at expantiating the view of Islam with respect to female education.

Concept of female Education

Female education is that type of education received by women that would make them become aware of themselves and their capacity to explore their environment (Okeke, 2000). Female education is, therefore, seen as a situation whereby women are given equal access to knowledge, skills, job and participation in the affairs of society. This type of education

involves training in literacy and vocational skills that would enable them become functional in the family and the society as a whole. The importance of female education in Islam could not be overemphasized. This is because prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) stressed its essence when he submitted that 'if you educate a man, you are educating an individual, but if you educate a woman, you are educating a family, and a nation.

The truth of this statement is borne out of the different roles women are called upon to play in modern society as housewives, mothers, social mobilizers and citizens. The statement underscores the indispensability of women education in national development which in turn advances families. Through woman's education, the ability of a woman is developed to the maximum because she would know herself better, achieve her heart desires, improve her economic status and restore her self-worth, confidence and participation in decision-making.

Today, an average woman is expected to be catered for by her husband at home, meaning that she has nothing to do other than to bear and rear children, cook and feed the family. But, the modern trend has shown that this occurs as a result of her poor educational background. As society changes, so also, is the role of women. Women are no longer house wives; some are even bread winners in the families, the reason being that their acquisition of higher academic qualification qualify them to secure lucrative jobs and by extension earns fat salaries.

In a country such as Nigeria, the role played by women is gradually moving out of domestic services into many occupations hitherto reserved for men. This development is the result of women's education, for education has helped to equip women with valuable skills and competencies which enable them leave foot print on the sand of time. It has made many women self-reliant and resourceful (Okeke, 2000).

The role of women in Nigeria today, however, requires that they should not be only well educated but also, self-actualized in the sense that they need, like any other individual, to fulfill some basic essentials of living. Education is the light for all human beings male and female. It is a key to the development of any nation. But over the years it has been noticed that Education of girls has dropped drastically. The history of western education can be traced back to the pre-independence Christian missionary era. During the missionary era, most schools were predominantly boys. The marginalization of the girls then was partly attributed to social-cultural values of the society. The emphasis of colonial government was aimed at producing able bodied literate men to serve as servants, to the few whites. The only effort on female's Education then was the establishment of Queen's College at Lagos in 1927 as the female secondary school in Nigeria.

The first major step in the area of female education in Nigeria started with the 1969 curriculum conference which sought to among other things provide equal access to education at all levels. This development culminated in the formation of the National policy on Education in 1977 revised in 1982. The policy provides for equal Educational opportunities for all Nigeria citizens irrespective of sex. According to Lassa (1996) in Abdul Kadir (2004), by 1990 the female literacy rate in Nigeria was 39.5% compare with male, beside this available records have shown that even in the area of enrolment of pupils in the primary schools the boys are more in number than the girls.

UNICEF (2007) submitted that Girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefit of

empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development. Educated girls develop essential life skills, including: self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation. Girl's education also helps cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling disease and health status. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and, consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come. The United Nations Children's Education Fund Information Sheet (2007) revealed that In Nigeria, girls' access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. The 2006 National School Census (NSC) revealed a net enrollment ratio (NER) of 80.6% suggesting that a substantial proportion (19%) of primary school age population (6-11 years) is not enrolled in primary schools nationwide. This represents about 5 million Nigerian children aged 6-11 years old that do not have access to primary education. In the Northern part of the country, the number of children out of school is particularly high and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys and even 1 to 3 in two states. Although the gender gap has narrowed from 12 to 10 points, there exists wide variation across the States and zones, with the North Central and North West presenting worst scenarios.

Edlyne (2009) carried out a study on women, education and work in Nigeria, and was concerned with educational opportunities for women in Nigeria. He noted that although bias has existed from the traditional Nigerian society against women, recent events especially in education reveal a conquering of this deep-rooted prejudice. Enrollment figures particularly in the last ten years show a remarkable bridging of the gap between the genders. In other words, more and more women are acquiring tertiary education. He however, contended that the number of women who have acquired tertiary education is disproportionate to the number involved in the labour sector. Thus, a significant number of women with tertiary education do not get involved in the labour process in Nigeria.

Therefore, there is underutilization of manpower and a negative return to investment in human resources. Such factors as the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian labour market, women attitudinal and psychological dispositions, choice of marriage partners by women among others are identified as responsible for the marginal participation of women in the formal labour sector. He recommended that there is need for education to address the imperatives of development by liberating women from unfounded and baseless myths or stereotypes that keep them away from labour participation.

Influence of Religious Belief on female Education

Another major impetus to the negative attitudes towards female education in religion is that many Muslim parents associate western education with Christianity and such parent would not allow their children to go to school for fear conversion. Olayemi (1995) wrote on attitudes toward female education in Nigeria and most especially in Ilorin, Kwara State. Saying that Muslim parents in the area prefer to send their male children to school than the female (children) because they feel that Educated female children will only like to marry educated men and whereas most Educated men were Christians. "There is possibility that their Education female child could later convert to their own religion".

He further explains that "the purder after getting married also contributed a lot to the negative attitude of parents on female education. The fear that most educated females do not

favours and bounties, but their functions are not identical. In view of this diversity, there is a corresponding diversity between their respective faculties and capacities. This is indicated in the Holy Qur'an:

"Our Lord is He who endowed everything with its appropriate faculties and then guided it to their proper use (20:51)".

"God has fashioned mankind according to the nature designed by Him; there is not altering the creation of Allah. (30:31)".

Islam believes in the principle of the division of labour. It allots the strenuous work and hard outdoor life to man and makes him responsible for the maintenance of the family. It regards the maintenance of the home as the primary assignment of women. It allots managing the home and upbringing and training of children to woman. A work which forms the most important item in the task of nation building. It exhorts her to engage herself in the cultivation of learning and allows her to participate when necessary, in social uplift and other schemes of national reconstruction. Islam aims at reforming society in every possible way. Therefore, it can never come to tamper with this concept of progress. However, Islam opens up avenues of advancement for mankind. A good example of this paradox is provided by the Islamic teaching versus the attitude of Western civilization on the issue of chastity.

Unfortunately, the West no longer considers chastity a virtue, indeed it has become a reproach. Extra-marital living together and promiscuity have become the norm. Perversion and sexuality, inside and outside wedlock, are deemed the true purpose and object of sex. Woman has been degraded into a mere instrument for sexual indulgence. According to Islam, the relationship between the husband and wife should be characterized by grace. The glorious Qur'an says

"Consort with them graciously. If you dislike, it may be that you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good (4:20)".

Husbands and wives are reciprocal towards each other, but as man is the breadwinner and has the responsibility of providing for the wife and family and in the case of a difference in the manner of running the household he has the final word. Qur'an says

"And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them and Allah is exalted in power, Wise (2:228)".

On account of the physical willingness and delicacy of women and their vulnerability, men are appointed guardians over women.

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means..... (4:34)".

Most devastating in Western societies is the ever increasing freedom for illicit sex. No effort is spared to exploit and commercialize the female body. The result can be seen in the skyrocketing rise in the number of divorces, illegitimate children, sex crimes and cases of venereal diseases.

In a nutshell, a Muslim woman enjoys equal status with men. The object of her creation, her duty to God and her duty to fellow human beings are the same. A wife's rights are as equal with the husband and as a parent her status is higher than that of the father. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said that man's primary duty is to his mother and that paradise lies at the feet of the mother.

great pleasure and forgiveness will be asked for them. The learned are considered the heirs of the prophets. We also see that the worldly knowledge will not prevent the person to enter paradise. So, it is good we seek knowledge for good cause to humanity.

More so, Salaudeen (2011) noted that Islam does not in anyway, debar women from acquiring education or participating in communal or national developmental issues. On this note, reference is always made to Khadijah, Prophet Muhammad's first wife and Aisha. Khadijah was a business woman. She actually used to travel on her camel and bargain with men and make deals with them. Also, Aishah, one of Prophet Muhammad's wives not only narrated so many of his sayings, and teachings to many Muslims, many laws about Islam during his life and after his death, but also actively led an army of 60,000 Muslim men after prophet (peace be upon him) died. That battle was called the Battle of Camel". It is a very popular battle.

In Islam, the duty of seeking knowledge and learning is obligatory for every Muslim. However, women's education is emphasized in many of the *hadiths* of the Prophet Mohammed (SAW). He encouraged the education of members of the most marginalised communities including slave girls. The Prophet said:

.. "He who has a slave-girl and teaches her good manners and improves her education and then manumits and marries her, will get a double reward: (narrated by Abu Musa Al-Ashari)

This approach was followed to eradicate slavery in the early days of Islam, but at the same time indicates the importance of girl's education in the Prophet's (SAW) thinking. In Islam, the welfare of orphans is also emphasised.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education is the light of all human being male and female. It is a key to the development of any nation. It is only when women have proper education that they become compatible with their male counterparts and thus known their various roles to be played in the society and home. Female's Education become very important because of their roles that are being felt in the society. Nowadays, women are seen in all walks of life as custodians of culture, morality, economic management and child care of the family. But over the years it has been noticed that Education of girls has dropped drastically in favour of boys. This paper concludes that in Nigeria there was inequality in the educational attainment of boys and girls (AbdulKadir, 2004 & UNICEF, 2007).

It was also explained in this paper that the perception of some people that Islam discourages women or female education is erroneous. It was submitted that most Muslim parents see it as a waste of funds and time to educate the Muslim female child who will not be willing to shoulder responsibility in the family after her education. It was however stressed in the paper that Islam strongly advocates for female education. In line with the above points, it is strongly recommended that female's education need to be encouraged and promoted most especially among the Muslims. The erroneous belief held by some Muslims that Islam disallows female's education should be discarded. Parents also need to display positive attitude towards the education of their children generally without preference or prejudice to either male or female children.

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