Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education: Women’s Experience of Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunity

Eugene Okoli
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, Disability and Equity in Education Commons, and the Gender and Sexuality Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/902

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
GENDER DISPARITY IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION:
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF BARRIERS TO
EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

by

Eugene Okoli

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology
Dr. Charles C. Warfield, Advisor

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2007
Discrepancies between males and females in access to schooling, school completion rates, and participation in employment opportunities are still more the norm in some regions of the world than others. Limited access to education plagues women in Nigeria as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa. Disparity in access to educational opportunity is a pressing gender equity issue in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003).

Relatively few studies have focused on obtaining the viewpoints of women who experience this phenomenon. To hear the voices of these women regarding how they gained or were denied access to education in the Nigerian context, a cross-section of 24 (12 educated and 12 nonliterate) Nigerian women were recruited for this phenomenological qualitative study. While 12 of them were college professors currently in teaching positions at three different universities, 12 others were nonliterate, self-employed women. Purposefully selected, the participants were representative of the three major ethnic groups and of the geopolitical character of Nigeria.

Review of relevant literature focused on the three historical moments in Nigerian education and how they played out with other sociocultural factors to affect women's participation in education.
The primary method for collecting data was individual, face-to-face in-depth interviews. Utilizing the phenomenological approach, the interviews focused on “generating useful information about lived experience and its meanings, as well as to understand how, through experience, the phenomenon being studied appears to the consciousness of the participant” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Significant themes that emerged for the nonliterate participants indicated that lack of information of the value of education on the part of parents, early marriage, and cultural capital on males over females accounted for denial of access to education. For the educated, family background, men’s perception of educated women as a threat, and emotional support from significant others were important factors. A cross-sectional theme that emerged revealed that traditional education was still highly regarded today, but incomplete without formal education. Surprisingly, religion was not a barrier to women education in this study. Other findings and implications for practice and research were discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would sadly be lacking in courtesy to claim credit for a project of this magnitude. I could not have done it alone. My gratitude goes to my advisor, mentor, and chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Charles C. Warfield. I could not have had a better academic advisor. I am eternally grateful for your support and motivation. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr. Walter L. Burt for his incisive and helpful feedback. Thank you, Dr. Gabriel M. Jiabana for your steadfast, honest approach. You were very insistent on asking for justification for every bit and piece of the project. You are an inspiration to me.

I want to thank the participants in the study. I was thrilled to know how much awareness they had and how covertly and overtly they were clamoring for change: that women have access to education and reach their educational potentials. People in my life deserve special appreciation. My mother, siblings, relatives, as well as friends have been supportive. With you I shared the joys and frustrations encountered toward the completion of this project.

It is my wish and dream that in the years to come generations of women will belong to a society where sex and gender will not be a barrier to educational opportunity. To God be the glory, praise, and honor forever. Amen.

Eugene Okoli
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................. ii
LIST OF FIGURES ........................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 1
   Research Questions .......................................................................... 4
   Rationale for the Study ...................................................................... 5
   Theoretical and Conceptual Framework ............................................ 7
   Purpose of the Study ......................................................................... 9
   Delimitations/Limitations of the Study ............................................. 10
      Delimitations of the Study ........................................................... 10
      Limitations of the Study ............................................................ 10
   Assumptions .................................................................................... 11
   Operational Definition of Constructs ............................................ 11
   Placement of the Researcher .......................................................... 13
   Summary ......................................................................................... 13

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ........................................... 15
   Overview of the Study ...................................................................... 15
   Education in Nigeria Before Colonialism ....................................... 19
   Education in Nigeria During the Colonial Era ............................... 25
   Education in Postindependent Nigeria ........................................... 32
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Aims and Structure of Primary Education</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics of Gender Education and Mechanism of Selection</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Women’s Education</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of Schooling</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Marriage</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Education</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Theory and Access to Education</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Equity</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Women in Nigeria</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of Religion on Women</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Selection</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Participants</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Analysis</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of Research</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to Subjects</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

Protection for Subjects ................................................................. 66
Confidentiality of Data .............................................................. 66
Instrumentation ........................................................................ 66
Informed Consent Process ......................................................... 67
Summary .................................................................................... 68

IV. RESULTS ............................................................................. 69

Participants ................................................................................ 69
  Demographics of the Educated Participants .......................... 70
  Demographics of the Nonliterate Participants ....................... 71
Research Experience .................................................................. 71
Emergent Themes ...................................................................... 72
  Emergent Themes for the Nonliterate Participants ............... 72
  Emergent Themes for the Educated ....................................... 80
Review of Research Questions ................................................... 87
Research Questions for Nonliterate Participants ....................... 87
Research Questions for Participants Who Had Access to Formal
  Education ................................................................................ 89
Comparable Question Across Both Populations ....................... 91
Summary .................................................................................... 92
Table of Contents—Continued

CHAPTER

V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS ................................................ 93

Summary ................................................................................................ 93
Discussion of Findings ................................................................. 94
Recommendations for Future Research ............................................. 96
Implications for Practitioners ...................................................... 97
Conclusions ...................................................................................... 98

APPENDICES

A. Interview Outline for Nonliterate Participants ................................. 100
B. Interview Outline for Educated Participants .................................. 103
C. Initial Email Letter to Heads of Departments for Female Professors 106
D. Script for Heads of Departments for Female Professors .................. 108
E. Initial Email Letter to Heads of Departments for Women Chairpersons 110
F. Initial Email Letter to Potential Participants .................................. 112
G. Script for Interview Follow-Up Contact to Participants .................. 114
H. Consent Document .......................................................................... 116
I. Script for Nonliterate Participants Regarding Waiver of Signed Consent 119
J. Consent Form and Waiver of Signed Consent Request for Nonliterate Participants 121
Table of Contents—Continued

APPENDICES

K. Approval Letter From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board ................................................... 124

L. Demographics of Participants ..................................................................... 126

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................. 129
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Conceptual Framework ......................................................... 9
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Education plays an important role not only in economic development but also in improving social equity. It enhances the overall quality of human resources within an economy. Better health and nutrition, improved hygiene, higher child survival rates, and increased health education and awareness have all been associated with education (Dundar & Haworth, 1993; Lee, 1998). More specifically, research has shown that there is a high relationship between literacy and fertility, lower maternal mortality, lower infant mortality, and higher nutrition (Browne & Barret, 1991). The benefits and effects of education go beyond the women and their immediate families and contribute to long-term alleviation of poverty in the society. Creation of an informed citizenry, and substantive advances in healthcare and reproductive services have occurred for access to education, (Nguyen, 2000; United Nations, 2000). There is increasing consensus in the international community that education is an important, essential aspect of basic human development (UNICEF, 1990; United Nations, 1994; USAID, 1995).

Closing the gender gap through access to education has become crucial. Education has become a source of social stratification more than anything else. Brooks (2005) encapsulates the situation very vividly. He asserts that less than three decades ago, we had a society stratified by bloodlines. But now we live in a society stratified by education, and as the information economy matures, we are learning that it comes with its own brutal barriers to opportunity and ascent. In other words, a social chasm is
opening up between those in educated society and those in uneducated society, between educated and uneducated individuals, and that vast behavioral differences reflect the different social norm between the two classes. Not everyone has equal opportunity and access to education, and women in general have less access than men. Rousso and Wehmeyer (2002) maintain that most educational environments are more often characterized by gender bias, than by gender equity. School policies, curricula, interaction styles of teachers and students, as well as other characteristics of the school culture are too often based on gender (Funk, 2002). Ropers-Huilman (2002) elucidates that even in higher education positions, the general trend is the higher the position, the fewer the number of women holding those positions.

Drinan (2004) sees systematic discrimination against women as embedded within the economic, social, political, and even linguistic structures of our society. Prevailing norms about what women and men do, and how their activities and roles are to be valued determine the opportunities to which they have access (Subrahmanian, 2005). Illiteracy is a reflection of social, political, and economic inequality in a society, and to a lesser extent of limited access to education. On that note, Stromquist (2006) claims that failure by many women to acquire literacy skills is often not a question of intelligence, but rather of the limited access to literacy programs and formal schooling.

Discrepancies between males and females in access to schooling, school completion rates, and participation in employment opportunities are still more the norm in some regions of the world than others. Heyzer (1995) contends that despite constituting 50% of the world’s population, women represent 60% of the more than one billion adults who have no access to education. They represent 70% of the world’s
absolute poor, earn only 10% of the world's income, and own less than 10% of the world's property. Providing a fair and equitable education system, therefore, has political, economic, and social implications (Gorard & Smith, 2004).

Researchers found that when compared with men, women are poorer and have fewer opportunities to fulfill their educational potentials, and their circumstances are significantly more difficult in some parts of the world than in others (Richburg, Nelson & Tochterman, 2002). The World Bank Group (2003), reporting on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), attests that women's productivity/potential is hampered by widespread inequality in education and access to essential services and skills between males and females. Some staggering regional disparities call for concern. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics, the estimated illiteracy rate for SSA women for the year 2000 was 39.7%, compared to much lower percentages in the following regions of the world: America, 7.3%; Oceania, 4.6%; and Europe, 1.3%, respectively. The only other region of the world with equally high illiteracy rate as SSA is Asia, at 24.9% (UNESCO, 1999b).

Women in Nigeria as well as in SSA have been plagued by limited access to education. Disparity in access to educational opportunity is a pressing gender equity issue in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003). Bush (1995) asserts that there are many possible reasons for this disparity, but there can be little doubt that women are educationally disadvantaged and that this represents an enormous waste of human capital. Studies continue to show that women experience gender inequity in salary, employment, leadership, and politics (Collins, 1998; Frieze, Olson, & Good, 1990; Pippa, 2001; Rhode, 2003). Even when women gain more access to education, this does not
necessarily translate to equal educational and career opportunities (Misko, 2001). However, a good number of women have transcended some of the impositions and barriers that impeded their access to participate in education (Yamundow, 2001). It is pertinent to investigate how these women overcame these barriers. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the current experiences of some select Nigerian women with regard to formal education. In addition, the study attempted to assess the barriers that hinder gender equity as they relate to access and equal educational participation in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Creswell (1998) suggests that a researcher reduce his or her entire study to a single, overarching question and several subquestions (p. 99). These are open-ended questions, evolving and nondirectional, starting with such words as “what” or “how” rather than “why,” and are few in numbers.

The central question for this phenomenological study is: What is the experience of Nigerian women with regard to access and participation in formal education? Because of variation in the subjects for the study (i.e., those who did not have access to formal education, and those who had access to formal education), two sets of specific subquestions guided this study:

(a) Research questions for participants who did not have access to formal education include the following:

1. Who or what are responsible for women’s lack of access to formal education?
2. In what way(s) do women’s cultural or religious roles affect their inability to have access to formal education?

3. Does having access to formal education make a difference in the lives of women? In other words, what would women do differently if they had access to formal education?

(b) Research questions for participants who had access to formal education:

1. Who or what influenced women’s ability to have access to formal education?

2. What experiences, supports, and/or challenges did women encounter in schools?

3. What is the impact of formal education on Nigerian women?

4. How or in what way(s) did parents and extended family member(s) support women’s education?

Comparable question across both populations: What is the role of indigenous education in women’s upbringing?

Rationale for the Study

Previous studies have been conducted regarding women’s education in Nigeria. Global agencies like UNESCO, World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank (1995) have all focused on generic studies regarding dropout rates of girls, faulting poverty as the underlying factor for low enrollment of girls in schools. Yamundow’s (2001) ethnographic study focused on women’s perception of equal educational opportunity and strategies used to overcome barriers in The Gambia. The Gambia, as
one of the countries in SSA, shares some similarities with Nigeria but differs in socioeconomic, cultural, and political set-up. Furthermore, Yamundow recommends that further research be conducted that takes into account cultural relevance in educational policies. Obasi (2000) investigated the impact of economic recession on Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria and underscored that most Nigerian households underinvest in the education of girls because of a combination of poverty and gender-biased tradition. These studies on women's education in Nigeria have their limitations. As much as they have all focused on surveying girls who dropped out, none had focused on obtaining the personal viewpoints of women regarding women's education.

This study endeavored to interview women who did have access to education as well as women who did not. On the one hand, understanding the personal viewpoints of these women helped to assess the strategies that women who had access to education used to overcome the barriers they may have faced while striving to achieve their educational goals. On the other hand, obtaining the viewpoints of women who never had access to formal education also helped to analyze the constraints that denied them access. This study added to the existing body of literature on women's education in Nigeria as well as SSA by engaging in new ways to construct new understandings (Crotty, 2003).

The present study is unique and important to the present-day Nigerian educational policy makers in general and Nigerian women in particular. Exposing the cultural influences, barriers, and challenges, and understanding the factors responsible for underrepresentation of women regarding participation in education industry is critical to recommending institutional interventions.
There is dearth of literature regarding women’s education specific to countries in SSA. Most of the literature come from information and sometimes (incomplete) data, supplied by officials of participating countries kept by international organizations and agencies, which in many ways do not reflect details of the views of individuals who experience the phenomenon being studied.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on a combination of critical theory and feminist education theory (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003; Olesen, 2005). On the one hand, critical theory known for its ability to challenge the status quo is predicated on empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, or gender. To examine the lived reality of social life, Crotty (2003) believes that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.

Feminist education theory, on the other hand, is based on the premise that diverse and oppressive situations that surround women inform and affect women’s lives. Feminist education theory serves as a lens to understand gender disparity in education, and how these differences play out in limited access to education, which ultimately results in unequal educational opportunity. Critical research and feminist education theory tend to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping decisions that crucially affect their lives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 437).
Hanna (2003) asserts that equality of access to education for women became one of the predominant aims of the feminist movement, and researchers have increasingly turned their attention to this issue. In her study on how gender inequity manifests in poor reproductive and mental health outcomes, Murphy (2003) contends that gender norms create disparities in power, autonomy, and well-being, typically to the disadvantage of females.

Understanding the lived experience of those persons who have traditionally or otherwise been excluded from participation in education industry may contribute to addressing this social injustice or deprivation.

The conceptual framework for this study rests on the logic or assumption that women are underrepresented in access to formal education in Nigeria. This is evident in the percentage of enrollments and literacy rates as contained in Figure 1. Some known barriers toward education access include economic, religious, effects of colonization, and sociocultural variables. Addressing these barriers, identifying how they militate against access to education, with the goal of minimizing or eliminating them through appropriate intervention may lead to equitable educational opportunity. Educational opportunity may lead to awareness and ability to seek and obtain essential services where they are available. Expected outcomes may include improved family health, enhanced economic well-being, low mortality rates, as well as elevated status of women, and gaining career positions within the workforce.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (adapted from Yamundow, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

Creswell (1998) contends that the purpose statement, the major objective or intent for the study, provides an essential road map for the reader. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the experiences of some select Nigerian women regarding gender disparity as it relates to women's access to education or lack of it in Nigeria. Specifically, this study seeks to assess the barriers that hinder access to education and equal educational opportunity in Nigeria.
Delimitations/Limitations of the Study

Delimitations describe the populations to which generalizations may be safely made, and limitations refer to limiting conditions or restrictive weaknesses of a study's design (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000, p. 17).

Delimitations of the Study

Only a cross-section of literate (those who obtained formal education) and nonliterate (those who had only traditional education and no Western-style education) Nigerian women were recruited for the study. The scope of the study reflects the geopolitical character of Nigeria, representing North, Southeast, and Southwest. It may have insights for other regions but is purposefully focused on one country.

Limitations of the Study

Only Nigerian women resident in Nigeria participated in this study. Because the researcher chose to utilize a homogeneous group (Nigerian women) for this study, the generalizability of the study's findings was restricted to that group. Furthermore, participants were required to use English for their responses, which may not be their first language. However, participants who did not have access to formal education used their native language in responding to the interview questions.

The study conclusions must be limited to the study population and regions investigated. Any attempt to relate the findings of this study to other regions of Nigeria in particular and SSA in general must be done with caution. For greater generalization.
and for comparison purposes, further investigation needs to be carried out with other ethnic groups to confirm or reject the conclusions of this study.

Assumptions

The following assumptions guided this study:

1. The participants are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation.
2. All responses from the participants are expected to be honest, and some participants may not be forthcoming in answering some sensitive interview questions.
3. The participants represent the geopolitical structure of Nigeria, and thus the target population.
4. The ethnic diversity of the participants and age differences between the two groups would help keep track of generational educational trend in women education from one ethnic group to another.
5. The outcome of this study and subsequent recommendations may improve access to education for all (women) where gender and/or sex do not limit people.

Operational Definition of Constructs

In order to fully understand the key terms that characterize Nigerian education for the purpose of this study, definitions of key terms must be made clear.
Traditional education: It is education as old as “Man” himself in Africa (Fafunwa, 1981). This is the traditional cultural, informal education that pre-dates Western education, which each Nigerian community has handed down to succeeding generations quite apart from Western-style education of the modern school system or the formal education of the Koranic (Muslim) schools (Taiwo, 1986).

Formal education: Western-style school education as introduced by the missionaries and used by the colonial masters to facilitate their occupation and trading purposes in Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa: Includes all countries of Africa except the northern African countries of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia.

Igbos: The people of southeast of Nigeria.

Yorubas: The people of southwest of Nigeria.

Hausa/Fulanis: The people of northern Nigeria.

Gender equity: This exists when both males and females have access, participate, and achieve their differing educational potentials through educational opportunities that meet their needs. Specifically, gender equity is defined as equal treatment for boys and girls according to their respective or equivalent needs as they gain access and participate in the educational process.

Equal educational opportunity: The ability of governments, agencies, and families to provide education evenly to all, regardless of gender.

Access: The ability of men and women to physically, emotionally, and financially gain admission to education without discrimination.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Placement of the Researcher

I believe strongly that education is a veritable instrument for change and transformation. My choice of topic is rooted in personal experience. I came from a family of eight siblings, five men and three women. All the boys had the opportunity of attaining at least basic primary education. All the girls but one did not have access to any formal education besides the traditional upbringing. My interest in the topic was also stimulated by what I perceive as cultural marginalization resulting in deprivation and undue economic dependence of women on men unconsciously encouraged to the detriment of families and communities, especially in Igbo culture.

Summary

Limited accesses to education and deprivation of equal educational opportunities have kept women, families, and societies in Nigeria and SSA economically poorer and have denied women from reaching their full educational potentials. Efforts by international organizations and nongovernmental organizations have contributed in creating awareness regarding this social neglect. Existing studies have also indicated poverty, traditional, religious, and gender stereotyping as being instrumental to decisions to sponsor a girl or a boy to formal education.

A broad review of available literature was conducted to gain a deeper insight and understanding of issues related to education and the cultural trends that affect access to education between boys and girls in Nigeria. This is presented in Chapter II. The
methods utilized in conducting this study are presented in Chapter III. The findings and discussion are presented in Chapters IV and V.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter examines the critical path and nature of gender disparity in the Nigerian education system, which culminates in women being disadvantaged. A look at the three basic moments in Nigeria’s educational history was pertinent for a clear synopsis. This helped to explore how the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial or postindependent eras dealt with providing education for all. The roles of these epochs were key to understanding contemporary Nigerian education, which shed the much needed light in analyzing the phenomenon of gender and educational disparity.

This review of related literature also endeavored to give a global overview of women’s education, extrapolated the sociocultural and religious factors that facilitated, constrained, and militated against equitable provision of education for all. In addition, gender equity was defined and feminist educational theoretical concepts explained.

Overview of the Study

The Year of the Woman, 1975, marked the turning point in paying closer attention to the affairs of women by international organizations and agencies. Conferences on women held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995), raised awareness regarding the abhorrent neglect of women in both the educational and development processes of some regions and countries. The Jomtien Declaration, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in
March 1990, stressed the need to remove gender disparities in access to education. The conference stated that education for girls and women was the most urgent priority for the achievement of the objectives of Education for All. During the Dakar Forum on Education for All held in April 2000, 10 years after the Jomtien Conference, participating countries reported that despite undeniable progress that had been made in providing girls and women with educational opportunities, considerable effort and greater commitment by governments and other stakeholders are still essential. To solicit the firm commitment from governments, political leaders, and international partners, Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations launched Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) at the Dakar Forum (UNESCO, 2002).

The costs of neglecting women and the apparent inequality in educational opportunity that characterize women’s situation call for attention and action. The conferences stimulated interest toward the integration of women in both the educational and developmental processes. Notwithstanding the efforts of international organizations, agencies and nongovernmental organizations, women still lag behind more in some regions of the world than others.

According to the United Nations, the developing countries in general, and SSA in particular, have the poorest/lowest indicators of human development. The region has the highest infant mortality rate, shortest life expectancy, and highest levels of illiteracy. In 1990, of the total 875.5 million illiterates in developing countries, SSA has 134.9 million illiterates of which 53.3 million are males and 81.7 million are females. In 2000, of the total 862.6 million illiterates, SSA has 137.8 million out of which 54.1 million were males and 83.7 million were females. The estimated adult literacy rates suggested that in
1990, 67% of population in developing countries were literate, out of which SSA accounted for 50%. Sixty percent were males and 41% were females. In 2000, out of the total literacy rate of 67%, 69% were males and 54% were females (UNESCO, 2002).

Without an education, women cannot get good jobs. Sub-Saharan African women face a barrage of factors that deny them access to participation in the educational process. Nigerian women encounter similar experiences.

Geographically located on the West Coast of Africa, Nigeria gained its independence from Great Britain on October 1, 1960. With an estimated population of 132 million, Nigeria has an area of 923,768 square kilometers. As Africa’s most populous country, Nigeria is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups. The three main ethnic groups are Hausa/Fulani, representing 29%; Yoruba, 21%; and Igbo, 18% of the total population. The Hausa and Fulani live in northern Nigeria, above the Niger and Benue Rivers. They speak Hausa and are predominantly Moslems. The Yorubas live in the Southwest, while the Igbos inhabit the Southeast. Being a secular state, Nigeria has no official religion. However, three main religious groups are dominant: Muslim, 50%; Christianity, 40%; and indigenous beliefs, 10%. The main Nigerian languages are Hausa (spoken in the North), Yoruba (spoken in the Southwest), and Igbo (spoken in the Southeast). English is the official language as well as the language of instruction in formal schooling and education. Over 70% of the total population lives in rural areas.

Of the first 39 years following Independence in 1960, the military ruled for 29 of them. Since 1999, however, a civilian government has been in place and the first handover of power to a new government (though from the same party) occurred in April/May 2003. The system of governance is presidential and federal. Over the past four
decades, the original three large regional entities (Northern, Eastern, and Western regions) that existed at the time of political independence have been subdivided to a current total of 36 states, plus the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja. A total of 774 local government areas make up the states. Federal government expenditures on education are below 10% of its overall expenditures (World Bank, 2003).

According to the World Bank (2003) records, the Federal Republic of Nigeria is the most populated country on the African continent with an estimated total population of 132 million. Females make up over 65 million of the total population of Nigeria. According to the Central Intelligence Agency’s (2003) World Factbook, the average population growth rate is 2.53%, while the total fertility rate is 5.4%. Compared with the birth and death rates of 38.75 and 13.76 per 1,000, respectively, infant mortality rate is 71.35 deaths for every 1,000 live births. Life expectancy is 51 years for the total population, but 50.89 years for men and 51.14 years for women. The estimated literacy rate for the populations aged 15 years and over in 2003 was 68% for the total population. Estimated literacy rate for men was 75.7% and 60.6% for women.

To increase female access to participate in both educational and developmental processes, educational policies, from postindependent through the present, have tended to be more inclusive for both genders. Access to formal education is open to all children from age 6, regardless of sex. Efforts have been made by governments to provide free universal primary education, but economic recession in the early 1980s presented a serious setback. However, because education is neither free nor compulsory, it is still left to the choice of parents depending on a number of factors. In spite of efforts to achieve
gender parity by providing equitable access to education, women are still underrepresented in both education and public sectors of the economy.

Currently, Nigeria operates a system of education popularly known as the 6:3:3:4 system. The components include 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary school (JSS), 3 years of senior secondary school (SSS), and 5 years of tertiary education. The goal of the 6:3:3:4 system policy is to equip students with the capacity for self-reliance in the economic, occupational, and other related spheres. Limitations in curricula, religious restrictions arising from ideologies, limited access because of costs, and stereotyping make it difficult for girls to participate proportionately in education.

Education in Nigeria Before Colonialism

Ukeje, Akabogu, and Ndu (1992) argue that because education is a process by which people are prepared to live effectively and efficiently in their environment, it is inevitably influenced by the political, economic, social, and religious climates of the time and place. Every age and people tend to devise a system of education suited to serve their needs and purposes. Fafunwa (1982), a Nigerian educationist, agrees that the evaluation of any educational system depends on whether it is meeting the needs of any particular society at any given time, and must not be judged by any extraneous consideration other than its purpose. Indigenous education was expected to meet the needs of traditional people in Nigeria and Africa prior to the coming of European trade and missionaries.

According to Banjo (1981), there were no schools in Nigeria before the advent of the missionaries, the harbingers of formal (school) education. But this does not mean
that there was no education of the young. The home was the school and the parents and the older members of the family formed the school staff. The task of educating the young centered around the immediate family and larger community to which the child belonged.

The arrival (or birth) of a child in a Nigerian family is a cause for great joy. It is celebrated with naming ceremonies and initiation rites. It is a common belief that a child is a gift and precious and as such welcomed by the whole community. The responsibility of educating the child morally, and supporting him financially and otherwise, does not devolve on the immediate family alone. Rather, it is the responsibility of the whole community since the child cannot be continuously under the eyes of his or her parents or older siblings all the time.

The statement that *it takes the community to train the child* is very appropriate in describing the Nigerian situation as far as extended family involvement in the upbringing of the child is concerned. Obanya (1995) posits that the teacher would be anyone who was older than the pupil and so knew more about the world. The child was given the education that enabled him or her to take his or her proper place in the society.

Education was organized along sex-roles and patterns in the community. The young women were prepared for motherhood roles, and the young men were rigorously prepared for manhood roles, which would incorporate adventures in courageous and virile tasks like hunting, fishing, and warfare. The gender of the child and the gendered nature of relations between family members crucially define a child's identity and opportunity (Stephens, 2000a).

While the exact form of preparation varies from one society or ethnic group to another, the principles are very much similar. Thus, the Nigerian indigenous education
existed for centuries. It was education based on the needs of the society, ranging from familial and religious roles to civic responsibility. Uchem (2003) contends that the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria have been historically predisposed to democratic and egalitarian social arrangements, which accorded women a degree of autonomy. Women’s participation in the governance of their community was ensured through the dual-sex political system. Each sex group generally managed its own affairs and had its own kingship institutions, age grades, secret, and title societies. Uchendu (cited in Uchem, 2003) contrasts the precolonial status of women in Igboland with that of European and American women, who at that time were treated as perpetual minors and “legal non-beings” (p. 27). He notes how women were barred from certain professions in Europe and the United States on account of their gender, whereas women had no corresponding socioeconomic restrictions in Igboland.

In contrast, indigenous education offered women positions of power, assertiveness, and influence. Cultural traditions empowered women’s ability to impose sanctions ranging from mass boycotts of funerals to conflict-resolution schemes with the aim of bringing the other party to negotiate. Daughters of the lineage who are married and living elsewhere (Umuada) have a big influence in their families of origin. Equally influential is the association of wives (Otu alutaradi) married to men of the same village. Under traditional cultural education, women in general wield collective bargaining power to safeguard and protect their interest against excesses of male dominance and oppression. A case in point is the historical Women’s Riots of 1929 or the Aba Riots, in which women protested their marginalization through a series of demonstrations. Imposing taxation on women without consulting them was believed to be the key issue.
About 50 women lost their lives during the crisis, but that did not deter their protests and demand to be represented in government (Uchem, 2003, p. 28).

Although Nigeria consists of many ethnic groups and societies each with its own subculture and tradition, they all have common educational aims and objectives. However, methods differ from place to place, chiefly because of social, economic, religious, and geographical imperatives. But the underlying consideration that informs the curriculum of traditional or indigenous education is buttressed in the words of Naibi (1981) when he says that:

the key may be found in what any good father would wish for his son, that he should grow to the full status of a man sound in mind and body . . . and that according to his ability should acquire the knowledge and the skill that will enable him to live a life useful to his fellows and enjoyable to himself as well as being able and willing to take his rightful part in the affairs of his community. (p. 24)

Education in old Nigeria is an integrated experience. It is not rigidly compartmentalized but intricately woven. It combines physical training with character-building, manual activity with intellectual training. Continuous assessment characterized the education which culminates in a passing out ceremony, or initiation into adulthood. At the end of each stage, demarcated either by age level or years of exposure and training, the child is given a practical test relevant to his experience and level of development. For the elect or the select, secret cults served as institutions of higher or further education. It was at this level that the secret of power (real or imaginary), like initiation into a masquerade group, profound native philosophy, science, and religion are mastered. The role of parents, extended family members, relatives, and the entire community at large in the traditional education of the child cannot be overemphasized. Education and training of the child is literally everybody's concern.
Story telling is a strong component of traditional curriculum. The little children are told stories, history of the family or the ethnic group, taught obedience and code of behavior, and respect for elders. Age is an important element in the life of a Nigerian. The traditional Nigerian education finds expression in the age group or age-grade associations. Seniority confers social and economic privileges. The principle of seniority reinforces the concept of authority and obedience. Successes are rewarded by the accumulation of experience, especially at old age (Azorji, 1988, p. 190). An elder, man or woman, is assumed to be a person of wisdom and is expected to demonstrate that in speech. Age is such a vital factor that a man or woman will overstate his age rather than understate it. Isichei (1976) comments that the traditional government (in Igboland) has sometimes been called gerontocracy. Closely connected with age factor is the ability to possess speech prowess.

Writing about the Igbo society in Nigeria, Igwe and Green (1972) remarked that a speaker who could use language effectively and had a good command of idioms and proverbs was respected by his fellows and was often a leader in his community. Fanon (1967) states that a man who has a language consequently possesses the world, expressed and implied by that language. This buttresses the place of proverb and local wisdom in the traditional life of the Nigerian. Moreover, the aim of traditional Nigerian education is multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, supportive, and conforms to the social order of the day.

Fafunwa (1982) stresses the importance of indigenous education when he states that no study of education in Africa is complete without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa before the coming of
Christianity and eventual Colonialism. Vargas (2000) shares a similar opinion when she asserts that the traditional or indigenous knowledge is a critical element that affirms the cultural heritage and ensures survival of indigenous peoples as it is related to the entire culture of a people, including its identity, spiritual, and religious beliefs. Indigenous education is as old as “Man” himself in Africa and is instrumental to understanding the history of education in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1982, pp. 12-19).

Although the educational objectives cannot be neatly delineated, seven aspects can be identified: (a) to develop the child’s latent physical skills; (b) to develop character; (c) to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority; (d) to develop intellectual skills; (e) to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labor; (f) to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs; and (g) to understand, appreciate, and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (Fafunwa, 1982, p. 20).

To a large extent, traditional or precolonial nonschool education offers the Nigerian child a sense of security, belongingness, and a behavior pattern necessary and desirable for effective life in the society. It is a process that prepares the child for participation in the life of his community. Education in Africa in its current form today has much to learn from precolonial education because it was solidly anchored in culture and everyday experiences of the African society. This education was African in ideology, content, and methodology (Bunyi, 1999, p. 340). In the understanding of an average Nigerian, traditional or indigenous education is all embracing as every social institution incorporates educational activities, which lead the individual to acquire behavior-
patterns, abilities, and skills necessary for effective citizenship in the community in which he or she lives (Ukeje et al., 1992, p. 2).

Uchem (2003) argues that a system of checks and balances maintained a subtle balance of gender power before the colonial policies upset the system, tilting it in favor of men and in the direction of the Western Christian cultural inferiorization of women (p. 28). The introduction of medieval Western Christian notions of inferiority of women came with the British colonizers, Christian missionaries, and the Nigerian male elite favored by the change (p. 27). Structural gender inequalities inherent in British education, government, commerce, and wage employment diminished women's status and respect obtainable in the traditional society.

In summary, gender roles, apprenticeship according to sex, stereotype, and gender-power boundaries characterize traditional education. Informal in both structure and pedagogy, traditional education aims at preparing the child for participation in the society. In other words, traditional education prepared individuals to act or behave in certain ways to meet societal needs and expectations. A person of noble character with specific skills was considered to be a well-educated and well-integrated citizen of his community. Such was how education was given and received prior to the arrival of European missionaries and trade that marked the official beginnings of formal education.

Education in Nigeria During the Colonial Era

The advent of missionaries and European trade led to formal education in Nigeria. Banjo (1981) asserts that the first object was to teach the child to read the Bible, and to write, as reading and writing go together. Side by side with the growth of the
missions was the spread of the British rule and European trade. Ozigbo (1988) views the missionary activity as not just converting Africans to the gospel of Christ but introducing them to a whole range of Western values, namely literacy, medicine, clerical and industrial education, wage earning, and social mobility. Believed to open the door to new jobs, new wealth, and influence, Western education was sought and appreciated. Over the years, educators have criticized both the philosophy and methodology employed in making Western education available to Nigerians (Bunyi, 1999).

Western education was transplanted without the necessary adaptations and modifications which the Nigerian cultural context demanded because the sole purpose of this formal education was to perpetuate the interest of the churches and European trade. According to UNESCO (1999a), acceptability and adaptability are integral elements of education. They argue that acceptability, described as the form and substance of education, incorporates the idea that curricula and teaching methods have to be acceptable and be made relevant to the students, culturally appropriate, and of good quality. Bigelow, Christiansen, Karp, Miner, and Patterson (1994) point out that curriculum should equip students to *talk back* to the world as it is supposed to be rooted in pupils’ needs and experiences. Education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural setting (Srikantaiah, 2005). Freire (1993) suggests that allowing students or individuals to have ownership of their knowledge is equivalent to respecting their culture, tradition, and identity.

The subjects of instruction introduced through the school system included reading, writing, English language, and arithmetic. Needlework being part of the
curriculum belongs exclusively to girls. English grammar, English history, and geography could also be taught at the discretion of the teacher. To effectively manage the schools, the British colonial administration enacted an ordinance in 1882, although affecting only the colony of Lagos at the time. Grants-in-aid provided for by the ordinance were to be applied for instruction in English language and not vernacular (Ukeje et al., 1992). To ensure that directives were adhered to the letter, Fajani (1969, cited in Ukeje et al., 1992) reports Rev. Metcalfe, who was appointed Her Majesty’s inspector of schools for West Africa, as saying in his 1884 report that “the native must and will know English in spite of all such well-meaning but diseased notions; it is the language of commerce and the only education worth a moment’s consideration” (p. 7). Ukeje et al. (1992) reflect that this was the beginning of official language policy, which has militated against the development of meaningful and functional education in the country.

Ironically, the African indigenous languages have been neglected in the formal education of the African child. Hofmeyer and Hall (1996) assert that the teaching method during the colonial period was dominated by whole-class interaction, concentrating on lower-order questioning and chorus recitation, with little pupil activity. English was widely used as the medium of instruction, though the capacity of pupils for self-expression in this language was often very limited. The colonial languages have always enjoyed a pride of place in formal education in Africa. This is despite the unequivocal views that many hold with regard to education in indigenous languages. These views were expressed very strongly by the UNESCO (1953) meeting of specialists. The meeting stated that the best medium for teaching a child is his or her mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically
for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among members of the community to which he or she belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO, 1953). The need to train people to serve as clerks and interpreters to enhance colonial commercial interests necessitated the development of skill to speak and write in English (Ukeje et al., 1992).

Taiwo (1969) contends that among other factors like lack of organization and supervision, failure to adapt education to the needs of the people characterized the British policy. Mbefo (1996) concurs that colonialism imposed an alien lifestyle through its schools and laws. The colonial officers understood their role partly as bringing the light of civilization to the dark recesses of the earth—a policy that was carried out without much attention to the language and culture of the Africans, which were at the time regarded as barbarous. Education was heavily religion-biased, intensely denominational, and shallow in content (Ozigbo, 1985).

The schools, often the same buildings as the churches, were ill equipped. Blackboards, chalk, and slates were in short supply and the curriculum was largely religious tracts or information unrelated to local background. Religious bigotry was the order of the day as different denominations had competing interests. Ozigbo (1985) observed that the schools were largely in the hands of mutually distrustful and competing churches. Many of the schools were unviable and wasteful to both the government and the local communities as the mission schools were confessional, partisan, and discriminatory (Ozigbo, 1985, p. 97).
Throughout the colonial period, schools were established. In the North, especially in Kano, Muslim education was delivered informally under the tutelage of *mallams* or *ulama* (religious tutors). They catered to the children of the well-to-do who wished to have their children educated in the new and necessary European learning, but within a firmly regulated religious context. Such schools were influential as local private schools that retained the predominance of religious values within a modernized school system. By 1914, when north and south of Nigeria were amalgamated into one colony, there were 59 government and 91 mission schools in the North and South, respectively (Taiwo, 1969).

The colonial period was characterized by scrambling for and partitioning of territories and proselytizing among missions over the indigenous people. In a village where one school would have sufficed, three or more appeared in order to match the number of different and competing missions. Bryson (2005) contends that European powers that determined Africa’s borders at the 1884 conference in Berlin were concerned not with questions of cultural (educational) or national identity of the recipient/host countries but with balancing their own rivalries and ambitions. The education they provided was conspicuously lacking in democratic principles that engender equity. The map they drew jumbled kingdoms together in some countries, split tribes, and clashed one language group against the other.

A huge omission or commission in the education schema of this period was failure to integrate and accommodate the interests and needs of the students and their communities. Traditional knowledge was erroneously characterized as primitive knowledge from a primitive culture. It is of the past, and therefore it is no good (p. 379).
Understanding how culture is persistent, enduring, and omnipresent is vital to galvanizing and sustaining interests and participation of people in any endeavor (Davis & Ebbe, 1993; United Nations, 1992).

Bishop James Johnson (1873) voiced the concern of the community in his letter to Hennessy, Governor of West African settlements, that

in the work of elevating Africans, foreign teachers have always proceeded with their assumption that the Negro or the African is in every one of his normal susceptibilities an inferior race, and that it is needful to give him a foreign model to copy; no account has been made of our peculiarities; our language enriched with traditions of centuries; our parables, many of them quintessence of family and national histories; our modes of thought influenced more or less by local circumstances. . . . God does not intend to have the races confounded, but that the Negro or African should be raised upon his own idiosyncrasies. . . . The result has been that we, as a people . . . have lost our self-respect and our love for our own race, . . . are become a nondescript people. . . . There is evidently a fetter upon our minds even when the body is free; mental weakness even where there appears fertility.

Describing the flagrant manner with which the early missionaries and colonial powers denigrated African culture and debased the educational process, Achebe (1998) asks the question:

Does the white man understand our custom . . . how can he when he does not speak our tongue . . . he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad . . . how do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? . . . We were amused . . . and allowed him to stay . . . now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one . . . he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (p. 176)

A shift of emphasis regarding the objectives of education led to the mindset that education was to fit a child for “white collar” occupation in the future, and the new way by which it was possible for people to get both government and church jobs easily (Makozi & Ojo, 1982). According to Ozigbo (1985), mounting evidence exists to prove
that education provided by the missionaries and European traders was clearly colonial and Western in its articulation, content, orientation, implementation, and management. Colonial education brought a new way of understanding and created clerical job opportunities, but the curriculum was lacking in local philosophy, orientation, and needs of the recipients.

Colonial education was also discriminatory and gender-oriented in practice. By the nature of its purpose and implementation, boys were mostly favored as the goal was to meet the immediate commercial interests of the European missionaries and traders. Only boys could be allowed by family members to meet the demands of this new form of education and the nature of jobs it provided, as these were considered not fit for women.

In summary, it is to the credit of colonial education that it produced indigenous peoples who became literate in Western-style education and served as court messengers, court clerks, and interpreters. Fafunwa (1982), however, underscores that the British government did not have any clearly defined policy on education in Nigeria for the overall development of the indigenous people. Other researchers argue that clamoring for a curriculum that emphasized only local content would still have been incomplete.

Despite the demerits of colonial education, Srikantaiah (2005) argues instead that education must engage students in critical reflection on indigenous cultures vis-à-vis other cultures. According to Bunyi (1999), cultural transmission is not a sufficient goal of education. Education must incorporate a cultural worldview and developments in the rest of the world that provide new ways of being in the world today (p. 344). Before Independence, efforts to provide a school system that would enhance equitable access to
education, develop curriculum embedded in indigenous orientation, as well as accommodate the Western cultural education was widespread.

Education in Postindependent Nigeria

Nigeria gained her independence from the British in 1960. With the attainment of nationhood, there was urgent demand to reformulate the country’s philosophy of education that would articulate the culture of the people and reflect a curriculum that is adjusted to the needs of the child and the society (Fafunwa, 1982, p. 211). Pressure groups, agitators, and interest groups rose to challenge the type of education to be given their children.

Bunyi (1999) observes that only few scholars would deny that colonial education was eurocentric and ignored the achievements and contributions of the indigenous populations and their ancestries. Colonial education did not cultivate the African student’s self-esteem and pride. Education in Africa today is still struggling to rid itself of this colonial legacy.

At Independence, Nigeria inherited an education system that was academic in character with emphasis on paper qualifications and the attainment of white collar jobs (Makozi & Ojo, 1982). Hitherto, the entire educational philosophy revolved around the orientation to prepare the pupils for examinations to get the white man’s job. The mentality was just “bookish” as pupils were loaded with information as much as could help them pass examinations. This period also saw the emergence of more primary schools, secondary schools, and other institutions of higher learning and universities aimed at making education more accessible.
The Aims and Structure of Primary Education

Until the Nigerian political revolution, which began in the early thirties and reached its threshold in 1960, the purpose of education as already mentioned was, by and large, the glorification of colonialism. Progress was slow throughout the period of the colonial era until the end of World War II. There was no national objective for education at any level in Nigeria. But on the eve of the Independence in the 1950s, Nigeria had gone through a decade of exceptional educational growth leading to a movement for universal primary education (Fafunwa, 1982, p. 167).

In line with the British policy, the goal of primary education was to produce well-qualified boys and, in some cases, girls who were capable of going to higher schools and colleges. Under the federal government (Education Act, 1957 in Federal Government of Nigeria, 1962), the philosophy, aims, and objectives of primary education were streamlined. The basic statements of belief about the role of Nigerian education generally and specifically included: (a) the belief in the worth of the individual and in the development of all Nigerian children and the development of the society; (b) the belief in giving each child equal educational opportunity to develop according to his ability; and (c) the belief in functional education that will facilitate living democracy as a way of life and promote the development of an effective, informed Nigerian citizenry.

The aims of primary education among other things were to prepare the child for life; promote effective citizenship through civic responsibility; provide a sound basis for reflective thinking; and cultivate physical, emotional, and intellectual growth. It also
includes the ability to solve personal and social problems, as well as engage in character and moral training (Fafunwa, 1982, p.12).

Furthermore, a classification of educational levels was carefully delineated to incorporate the developmental stages of the students, namely: (a) Nursery and Primary, (b) Secondary level, and Postsecondary level (Fafunwa, 1982, pp.194-197). It is expected that one level should lead to the other, bearing in mind the dynamics of human development. Apparent imbalance both among regions and between men and women in access to education was a source of concern to some well-meaning people (Ukeje et al., 1992, p. 421).

Prior to the free universal primary education (UPE) program, all private and parochial schools were made public schools in 1971, hopefully to provide more equal opportunity to gain education (Ukeje et al., 1992, p. 31). The curricula experienced some adjustment, and there was dire need to train teachers to meet the educational needs of the public schools. The national policy on education, for the first time, made a bold attempt to address the religious, ethnic, gender bias, and other problems of Nigerian education. Deliberations were made and established on the principle of respect for one’s religious inclinations as one pursues education. Top on the list were considerations of Koranic and Nomadic education, quota system in the universities, and private schools. To make education accessible to every child in Nigeria, the clamor for Universal Primary Education saw the light of the day.
Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria

The introduction of free Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria in September 1976 is predicated on a number of factors. Taiwo (1986) rationalizes that the UPE was established to improve overall school enrollment in the country and to correct the educational imbalances between one part of the country and another, and between males and females. Obasi (2000) holds that the scheme was based on the reasoning that every Nigerian child has an inalienable right to at least 6 years of primary education. The aim of UPE would be in consonance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) as a prerequisite for equalization of opportunities for education across the country in all its facets. In its 21st session of the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UNESCO, 1999a), the members emphasized that education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. Education has a vital role in empowering women, safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labor and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, and protecting the environment (p. 4).

Husen (1972) states that the provision of equality of educational opportunity embodies starting education on equal footing, receiving equal treatment during the process, and having equal opportunity to succeed in and through education. Besides the equity consideration, there are numerous benefits of basic education that justify the
pursuit of the UPE scheme as a policy. The UPE is also desirable on grounds of social justice as this made education accessible to the poor and rich alike, at least at this incipient level.

The federal grant to the states per pupil enrolled in primary education made the remission of school fees possible in the states. This again served as a major incentive for the states to publicize the free UPE scheme and encourage maximum participation in primary schooling by social groups, mostly the poor and girls in particular, who were previously underrepresented in primary education due to exorbitant fees (Obasi, 2000, p.191). The UPE program recorded a huge success and an unprecedented pupil enrollment of 8.2 million in primary school between 1976 and 1981. The progressively large number of over-aged children who enrolled in primary education as a result of free UPE caused the primary school enrollment to be far in excess of the population of primary school age (6–11) children for the school years 1976–77 to 1980–81 (Obasi, 2000, p. 198). Between the sexes, the extent of participation in primary education during the period 1976–77 to 1980–81 varied. Girls' participation in primary school over the period increased remarkably more than boys' participation. Obasi (2000) reports that the percentage of girls in gross primary enrollment was 49.55% in 1976–77 (slightly lower than that for the boys) and increased to 52.22% in 1980–81, while the percentage of boys decreased from 50.45% in 1976–77 to 47.78% in 1980–81. This puts girls' enrollment much ahead of boys' enrollment up to 1980–81.

The change in the demand for primary education in which more girls than boys enrolled clearly indicates that the nationwide free UPE scheme had a tremendous impact on girls' access to primary schooling. The observed impact could be explained by the
fact that the free UPE removed to some extent the constraints on girls' education arising from the interplay of forces of poverty and gender-biased tradition (Obasi, 2000).

Of the projected 60,000 additional teachers, only 48,780 were trained. There was underfunding and insufficient supply of teaching and learning materials. Like the accelerated program that UPE was, it was characterized by shallowness and mediocrity as teachers who had no prior training were recruited because demand for teachers far outweighed the supply. The government learned late the lesson of comprehensive planning and involvement (Taiwo, 1986).

Nevertheless, the UPE did not last as expected due to drastic economic recession, which affected the world oil market (Obasi, 2000, pp. 198-199). Petroleum products were the mainstay of Nigeria's economy and the major foreign exchange earner for the country. The recession meant that the country could not generate the much needed revenue to fund free primary education. Provision of buildings and furniture and payment of teachers' salaries and training of teachers became impossible (Obasi, 2000, p. 192). Funding issues notwithstanding, the UPE was of immense benefit to Nigeria in mobilizing its human resources, adjusting its educational imbalance, and providing Nigerian children with appreciable access to education.

Economics of Gender Education and Mechanism of Selection

The economics of gender education specifically in Igbo land favored the education of male children. Investment in female education among the poor was discouraged by socioeconomic forces. Gender role stereotyping among patriarchal ethnic groups seem to put women at serious educational disadvantage when compared with
men. Differing parental expectations may influence the educational aspirations and opportunities given to their children (Hyde, 1993; Misko, 2001). Misperception that women's education is believed to end in the kitchen and their duties are to bear and rear children for their husbands and to take care of them at home is widespread. Femininity has been stereotyped as submissive, dependent, and conforming (Burns, 1978). Most patriarchal ethnic groups assign to the man the role of bread winner for his family, which requires the males to seek formal training in school that will enable them to secure employment in the modern sector to equip them to provide for the family and for their parents in times of dire need (Obasi, 2000, p. 196).

Boys from the age of 6 years are encouraged to enroll in primary education. Similarly, girls at about the same age are made to stay at home, especially among the rural poor, so that the girls can help their mothers in fetching water and firewood and nursing the younger siblings. Girls, who had to stay out of school on account of poverty, serve as house-helps or babysitters to some well-to-do urban dwellers that go to rural areas to recruit cheap domestic child labor.

In return for giving out their children, these parents receive monthly or annual cash payments and some form of material help, like being provided with used clothing items and shoes or helping the parents with the payment of the school fees of some of their male children. The education of the first-born male is given priority over that of other male children because the right of succession and obligation to the family devolve on him. The interplay of the forces of gender-bias and role stereotyping with widespread poverty, therefore, not only keeps many primary school age children out of school but also fosters child labor and exploitation.
The free UPE was a revolutionary counter force that enhanced girls' education by removing much of the impediments arising from the interplay of the forces of poverty and gender-biased tradition. The UPE also discouraged child labor by inducing parents to enroll and keep their children in school, especially the girls, thus keeping them out of child labor market.

Barriers to Women's Education

A number of factors are responsible for women's limited access to and participation in education. These include sociocultural, religious, and economic barriers.

Costs of Schooling

According to Obasi (2000), poverty and gender-biased tradition operated in the following ways to keep many girls out of school. Before the introduction of the UPE, more girls than boys stayed out of school because of the existence of gender-biased tradition in patriarchal ethnic groups, in which females were considered inferior to males. The male child was regarded as superior because he succeeded his father and perpetuates the family name. The male was preferred over the female and therefore accorded better life chances, including the opportunity to attend and remain longer in school at the cost of much parental deprivation, even in situations of economic austerity. Ozigbo (1988) concurs that the Igbo society is a man's world. It was regarded as a blessing to be a male.

In some cases, prized commodities such as landed properties are sold or mortgaged to enable parents to sponsor the education of their male children. The
importance attached to male children is so great that there is usually strong pressure on a man (even among Christians) to take a new wife to bear the much-desired male children for him if the earlier wife bears only female children or is barren. Women who find themselves in this situation become social outcasts, isolated from family, friends, village society, and even religious life of the community (Yesufu, 2000, p. 144).

Early Marriage

Boys' education is also highly favored because girls, as soon as they are of age, are expected to marry into other families, and any investment in their education is lost by their family of birth to the family of their marriage (Obasi, 2000, p. 198). Dynamics in marriage also determine the educational future of girls. Hyde's (1993) study found that the influence of marriage and childbearing can play a decisive role in the enrollment of girls, especially where betrothal takes place at a very young age. This, however, varies from region to region. For example, in places where higher bride-price is paid for educated girls, parents tend to send their daughters to schools more. Davis (2006) asserts that marrying young is common in developing countries. Women and girls often have no say concerning when and to whom they marry. Economic hardship often forces families to give up their daughters to early marriage, which not only leaves the girls vulnerable to abuse but limits their educational opportunities.

Education can play a direct role in poverty reduction by enhancing the marketable skills of the economically disadvantaged and the vulnerable groups and by expanding their ability to take advantage of income generation possibilities and available social services. Optimists in women education contend that it plays a key role in
promoting the interests of women by increasing and diversifying their potential to contribute to national development goals. However, strategies to increase enrollment of females and retention in school are as important as female access to education.

Access to Education

In Nigeria, there is a great emphasis on education by the federal government (World Bank, 2003). As such, the government has adopted education as an instrument "par excellence" for effecting national development. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly articulates the educational needs and objectives of her citizens. The Constitution, in principle, ensures equal and adequate educational opportunities, striving to eradicate illiteracy, and when practicable, provide free, compulsory, universal primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Well-articulated plans to sponsor free adult literacy programs, promote indigenous languages, and as well provide education that is more equitable, more accessible, and meaningful to the people interspersed the text (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Despite all the arrangements, the goal of reaching equitable education for all is far from being realized.

Reporting on school education in Nigeria, the World Bank (2003) claims that in 1999, President Obasanjo launched the Universal Basic Education Program. This falls in line with the Nigerian government’s commitment to international agenda regarding Education for All (EFA) by 2015. Considering the educational diversity across the country, the need to close the disparity gap and provide education equitably has not been more pressing. UNESCO (2002) contends that disparities between girls and boys start
with access to school. Accessibility engenders that educational institutions and programs have to be available to everyone without discrimination.

Other overlapping dimensions of accessibility include physical and economic accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability. Physical accessibility means that education has to be within safe physical reach, either by attendance at some reasonably convenient geographic location or via modern technology, for example, having access through a distance learning program. Economic accessibility implies that at least basic education has to be affordable to all. Emotional security in school is also a constitutive element of schooling and sometimes it is not taken care of in the provision of education for girls as it is for boys (UNESCO, 21st Session, Article 13, p. 6, in UNESCO, 1999a). A school climate that is devoid of warmth, sense of belonging, and appreciation of people irrespective of gender is less probable to being a stimulating environment for learners (Moreno & Mayer, 2000).

Inequity in access to educational opportunity is a phenomenon common in most cultures in SSA. This has become critical as it continues to have an impact on girls' participation in primary and further levels of education. As already indicated, Lee (1998) reflects that education plays an important role not only in economic development but also in improving social equity. In many ways, the two are inseparable, as improved education enhances the overall quality of human resources within an economy. It is Davis's (2006) contention that investment made in education of young girls brings improvement of the lives of the girls in question as well as their families and community. Such women for the most part will go on to have healthier babies and raise better educated children.
Gender differentials persist at all levels of education and the gap widens at the higher levels. Low levels of education and training, poor health and nutritional status, and limited access to resources depress women's quality of life and hinder economic efficiency and growth. World Bank Group (1997) argues that education of females is the investment with the highest social returns. It is a catalyst that increases the impact of other investments in health, nutrition, family planning, agriculture, industry, and infrastructure. Nguyen (2000) claims that in the United States, in the first half of this century, equity for the most part in the literature meant making sure that each citizen had equal access to schooling. Thereafter, the primary interpretation of equity was educational opportunity.

Feminist Theory and Access to Education

Gender emerged as a one of the crucial outcomes of feminism. Biklen and Pollard (1993) analyzed feminist theories of gender in different ways. First, they addressed how gendered practices structure male supremacy and patriarchy, and how they uphold a relation of unequal and oppressive power. Furthermore, as gender becomes the site of power, it also becomes the basis for inequality. Second, feminist theories also address how the dynamics of patriarchy and male supremacy structure the social relations between and among females and males. Hilk and Conway-Gerhardt (1994) agree that gender equity can be realized only when sex-role stereotyping and sex bias or preference is eradicated in education. Gender has assumed a more complex definition beyond the biological notion of sex. It encompasses the social and cultural meanings of being female...
or male. According to UNESCO (2003), gender refers to all cultural expectations associated with femininity and masculinity but goes beyond biological differences of sex.

**Gender Equity**

Researchers describe gender equity as being fair and just toward both men and women, and showing no preference to either sex, but equal regard for both sexes (Funk, 2002; Klein, Ortman, & Friedman, 2002). It includes providing equal access to the full range of education programs and activities to students of both sexes. Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are used interchangeably in our society, it often delimits serious consideration for equity issues (Soldwedel, 1996). Similar constructs such as sex equity and women's educational equity have also been used to denote gender equity (Koch & Irby, 2002).

World Development Report (World Bank, 2006) defines *equity* in terms of two basic principles. First, equity is surmised as equal opportunity that a person's chances in life should be determined by his or her talents and efforts, rather than by predetermined circumstances such as race, gender, and social or family background. The second principle is the avoidance of extreme deprivation in outcomes, particularly in health and education consumption levels.

**Gender Equality**

Gender equality implies that rights and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Funk (2002) warns that gender equity should not be confused with sameness. Grossman and Grossman (1994) claim that
common belief may suggest that gender equity will be achieved when "males and females participate in the same courses of study and extracurricular activities to the same degree, their achievement is the same, they are treated the same by their teachers, and they are prepared for the same societal role" (p. 119). In contrast, gender equity takes into account the biological differences and is realized when both males and females achieve their differing potentials through opportunities to participate and when their needs are met. For the purpose of this study, we operationally define gender equity as equal treatment for boys and girls according to their respective or equivalent needs as they gain access and participate in the educational process.

Role of Women in Nigeria

Gender is a primary conduit for assigning roles and responsibilities. Gender shapes institutions, ideologies, interactions, and identities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). A very great deal is made of gender. After all, the first question asked at birth is, is it a boy or a girl? And the response is a prelude to a behavior expectation that is spoken or unspoken and affects how a people perceive a particular individual within a culture. The gender of a person is the primary predictor of behavior, used to make judgments, and determines to a large extent the dress, expectations, and roles (Carli, 1994). Gender norms prescribe the division of labor and responsibilities between males and females and accords different rights to them. Either intentionally or unintentionally, they help to socialize children into gender-defined behaviors and attitudes early in life (Murphy, 2003). "Gender expectations become the filter through which we screen our perception
of the world, and these gender screens often affect ways in which we view ourselves in the world of work and the world of home" (Carli, 1994, p. 10).

Women in Nigeria see themselves and their many roles and positions from many perspectives that reflect the cultural milieu and expectations. A number of factors account for the varying roles of women in Nigeria. Religious and societal expectations bear on the multifaceted roles women play in their communities and wider society.

Eze (1984) holds that women in SSA are subject to inequalities and conditioned by tradition and religion that encourage the subservient attitude and passive participation of women in the life of their community. The Nigerian woman occupies an important position in the life of her community. Her varying roles include being a woman, a wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, and so on (Yamundow, 2001). In addition, she plays a key role in the economic and agricultural needs of her immediate family. World Bank Group (1997) asserts that women are a key economic resource in Africa, comprising about 60% of the informal sector and providing about 70% of total agricultural labor. Women's central position in economic production in SSA contrasts with the systematic discrimination they face in accessing basic technologies and resources needed for their economic role. This gender-based discrimination limits economic growth. It markedly affects macro-economic policy and performance (supply response), and has important repercussions for economic efficiency and equity (World Bank Group, 1997).

Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle (as cited in Yesufu, 2000) noted that poverty does not come to women altogether from lack of education and training, or from a generational culture of poverty, but from the excessive demands imposed on them. Societal and familial demands on women in general and working women in particular are
tremendous. As women stretch themselves to the limits to meet these demands, they are barely if at all supported in their circumstances. Westwood and Bhachu (cited in Yesufu, 2000) remark that men tend not to support or resist women's attempt to gain economic equality because they think this would threaten their superior status in the job market as well as their patriarchal status. Obbo (1980) claims that some women tend to become "big headed" when they have economic strength. Although economic empowerment of women in Nigeria is gradual, it has enormous obstacles to surmount.

Percy (1999) laments that despite women's significant contribution to agricultural production, their limited access to credit and loans, inputs, land, and other resources is the order of the day. Improved access to agricultural services, education and training, and rural financial services continue to target and benefit men much more than women (Percy, 1999, p. 397). Lack of access to land, appropriate technologies, poor market infrastructure, information, and facilities characterize subsistence agriculture despite most of the farm work being reliant on women and child labor. For example, access to land in the Igbo ethnic group is only through a male relative (Kisamba-Mugerwa, 2001; Otieno, 2001). Within some ethnic groups, the land inheritance system does not allow women to own any piece of land, although they can acquire it for purposes of food production (Otieno, 2001, p. 8).

Restrictions are even placed on the type of crops to produce based on gender. For example, about three decades ago, it was common that women were not allowed to plant yams, which were considered exclusively a man's crop because of the value attached to the crop. Despite their contributions to food production, women are excluded from income-generating projects and pushed into poverty (Monson & Kalb,
Bryson (1981) further argues that women are excluded from the money-yielding projects because men fear that women will amass wealth and be able to run their own lives. Occupational stereotyping also plays a major role in keeping women from jobs that are thought of as “men’s work.” Women are rather expected to engage in “women’s work” (Johnsrud & Heck, 1994).

Women in Africa are systematically underrepresented in institutions at the local and national level and have very little voice in decision making, even in issues affecting their lives (Eze, 1984, pp. 141-152). Gender barriers limit women’s participation and reinforce power gaps. Limited access and sometimes outright denial to formal education creates constraints for them to fully participate in the society. They lack basic numeracy and literacy skills necessary for participation. Without an education, they cannot get good jobs. Most are confined to the nonpaying, often backbreaking work of the home—fetching water and firewood, cleaning, cooking, tending younger siblings, and caring for the sick (Davis, 2006). McPherson (2005) argues that education of women, both formal and nonformal, is an external intervention that would enable families to enhance their knowledge, augment their skills, and take advantage of new information about production, consumption, and welfare-enhancing opportunities. He further contends that education and learning, if selectively and sensitively provided, would help to empower families and enhance their potential for healthy lifestyles. Education of some minimum quality enhances individual capabilities to stay healthy, earn a livelihood, have an effective voice in the community, and be socially, economically, and geographically mobile (p. 129).
Parents can benefit from their children’s schooling through higher family income, economic support when they are older, greater social status, and improved marriageability of their daughters. Society gains as well, through increases in productivity and income, reductions in population growth, and a healthier and more informed citizenry (King & Hill, 1993).

As civil society emerges, women’s organizations constitute an important social capital resource for strengthening the social institutions necessary for a market economy. Women constitute an important source of opinion (and opposition) on the subject of economic adjustment in Africa, and hearing their voices and listening to their needs is essential for endorsement of successful economic reform in Nigeria (Kisamba-Mugerwa, 2001, p. 2).

Astbury (1999) concludes that gender discrimination, with its negative impact on women’s reproductive health and other areas of life, is also accompanied by declines in women’s mental well-being and reproductive health outcomes. In his recent study of the health hazards faced by Nigeria women, Deann (2005) reports that the maternal mortality rate in SSA is alarming. Whereas a woman has only a 1 in 3,700 chance of dying from pregnancy-related causes in industrialized countries, an African woman’s risk of dying is 1 in 16 (World Health Organization, 1996). The Ministry of Health reports that at least 800 of every 100,000 women die of pregnancy-related causes every year in Nigeria. UNICEF estimates between 50,000 and 100,000 new cases of vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) each year in Nigeria, although many believe the actual number of fistula patients is significantly higher due to almost non-existent record-keeping and the embarrassing nature of the affliction. Many contract VVF as adolescent brides due to
early marriage, delayed labor, poor health care, and other harmful sociocultural practices related to lack of education and inability to access available services. Pregnancy and childbirth-related injuries drastically impede women’s ability to perform their duties both within the home and in society.

To combat high maternal mortality rates, the Nigerian government has launched the National Program for the Prevention of Maternal Mortality. The program aims to expand and strengthen advocacy projects for safe motherhood and to establish better access to antenatal facilities for the 27 million women of reproductive age in Nigeria. Working in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the program has already developed several initiatives to reduce the maternal death rate ("New National Program to Prevent Maternal Mortality," 2006).

Nigeria’s high maternal mortality rate is being aggravated by the prevalence of fake drugs, poorly trained health workers, and unkempt facilities. To take concrete steps toward safeguarding the life of women, Nigeria’s then first lady, the late Stella Obasanjo, set aside May 22 every year to be officially recognized as National Safe Motherhood Day in Nigeria. At the opening of the 2005 ceremony, she solicited the assistance of foreign health partners to provide medical facilities and technical assistance ("New National Program," 2006). Female education is recognized as one of the critical pathways for promoting social and economic development. Murphy (2003) agrees that poverty-related conditions combine with gender as contextual factors in maternal deaths in developing countries (p. 206). In addition, understanding the role of religion in determining access and social equity in Nigerian society is vital.
Impact of Religion on Women

According to Guven (2005), religion remains a very potent force in society, and religious tenets and rituals continue to play an important role in the lives of people. Islam and Christianity are widely practiced in Nigeria. Only a fraction of the population professes African traditional religion (ATR), the potency of which has been seriously diminished by the inroad and proselytizing of indigenous people by Christianity and Islam. Scholars claim that these two religions have contributed to and influenced secular and modern understanding of human rights in Nigeria (Yesufu, 2000). Origins of universal ethics are greatly indebted to the Bible, whose teachings are shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Claims of equality of sexes before God (Galatians 3:28, New American Bible), assertions that all are one in Christ Jesus and therefore no Jew or Gentile (Romans 10:12) intersperse the holy writ. Ishay (1997) quotes the Qu’ran (Sura 12) to support human rights in Islam as saying that

the society thus organized must live under laws, that guide their everyday life, based on eternal principles of righteousness and fair dealing, honesty to one another . . . yet to suit times and circumstances and the varying needs of average man and woman. . . . O ye who believe, the law of equality is prescribed to you. (Yesufu, 2000, p. 145)

Uchem (2003) contends that some negatively-operating biblical myths about women display a gender-bias and account for the subordination of women. A literal reading or interpretation of Genesis (chapter 2) implies that women are created as an afterthought and occupy a secondary position in the order of creation. Furthermore, sacred scripture is interwoven with cultural elements that are largely male-centered and
patriarchal, and these are used to manipulate women into accepting their devaluation and resisting efforts to change their situation.

In principle, these two religions espouse the equality of sexes, and none overtly endorses the superiority of man over woman or vice versa. However, Uchem (2003) argues further that the introduction of medieval Western Christian notions of women’s inferiority into Nigeria by the British colonizers, Christian missionaries, as well as support gained from the elite (men) favored by the change, diminished the relative status enjoyed by women in traditional societies. She further underlines that despite the relatively positive status enjoyed by women, they face cultural subordination, which manifests itself in male child preference and rigid gender-specific roles (p. 29).

Religion is an important element in the life of every Nigerian. It permeates an entire way of life in agriculture and family, and its teachings ascribe modes of behaviors. Young (1994) insists that women, as biggest consumers of religion, are deeply involved with religious beliefs and practices, but on the whole badly served by the religions themselves. Religion is considered one of the barriers to education of women in Nigeria. Discussing the place of women in Islamic religion in Nigeria, Nwankwor (1989) asserts that women definitely occupy a lower place than men. “They have fewer legal rights and duties as reflected in marriage, divorce and inheritance, and their place is principally at home” (pp. 172-173). Married and young women have a right to Koranic (Madrassa) instruction, although young women are barred from common prayer at the mosque in order to avoid being a distraction to men. The Koran allows polygamy. A man can have four wives and as many concubines as he can maintain. Adamu (cited in Nwankwor, 1989) claims that polygamy is a function of marriages arranged by parents, which
includes child and gift marriages. Girls tend to get married at 11 or 12, while for boys it is 15 or 16. Women are considered great economic assets. Besides bearing children and keeping the home, they also help on the farm, especially among the rural population.


Prejudices toward women in religions, like in most spheres of life, have survived and thrived on the basis of Sharia law, which accords limited rights to women (Halim, 1994). In Sharia law is found the life, culture, and politics of Islamic religion (Nwankwor, 1989, p. 168). Sharia law as distinguished from Islamic law violates the status of women by holding that there is no equality between men and women. Men are considered superior and women are treated as subordinates. According to Yesufu (2000), Islamic laws are those laws that have come directly from Allah and so we cannot do anything about them, but Muslim laws are those made by people who are Muslims, followers of Islam but not by Islam itself (p. 146).

There is no consensus in literature regarding whether Islamic religion was a key factor in limiting women's participation in education. Hyde (1993) argues that parents' wishes to protect daughters from undesirable influences appear strongest in areas that are still traditional. This explains, for example, why northern Nigeria stands in sharp contrast to other parts of the country in the percentage of girls not enrolled in school.

Denzer's study (cited in King & Hill, 1993) states that the reasons for the relative underdevelopment of education in Muslim northern Nigeria are often ascribed to the
resistance of the emirs to the introduction of Christian missionaries and the spread of Western education. Furthermore, women are expected to live in physical seclusion (purdah) based on Islamic religious tenets still practiced in some Muslim countries, including Nigeria. It is not only a constraint on Muslim women but diminishes their opportunity to contribute to the society. Arguments have raged even among Muslims as to the orthodoxy of the practice and its propriety at this time and age. Western-style education is regarded as a vehicle of imperialism, and a threat to both Muslim and Hausa values, as well as a threat seen as dangerous for women, whose duty it was to protect the traditions (Guven, 2005). For example, in Muslim countries, an unveiled woman represents modernity, progress, and development, while the covered woman is a symbol for tradition and cultural preservation (Abirafeh, 2003).

Robertson (1986, cited in King & Hill, 1993) points out, however, that Islam should not be held responsible for the low enrollment of girls. Sudan, another country in SSA, was a counterexample. The Muslim North has significantly higher school enrollment rates than the Christian and traditional South.

It is not clear how religious teachings single-handedly factor in as far as limiting women's access to education is concerned. Azorji (1988) brings to mind the inseparable character of culture and religion. He elucidates that as religion vivifies and illuminates culture, culture gives flesh and substance to religion. Culture provides the context and the living space for religion (Ozigbo, 1988). Crotty (2003) argues that culture is best seen as the source rather than the result of human thought and behavior. He emphasizes the hold our culture has on us, such that without culture we cannot function as it shapes
the way we think, the way we see things, and the way we behave throughout our lives (p. 79).

Because religion and culture are so intermingled, people's belief systems and behaviors are therefore transmitted through culture and religion and vice versa. Although it may not be conspicuously clear how religion per se impedes women's access to education, it may well be that it is reinforced through cultural practices. Despite a strong religious basis as to why women should not be treated as second class citizens, common expectation is that women should accept the superior position accorded to men by the Bible and the Qu'ran. Cultural forces that reinforce this belief especially in patriarchal family systems are pervasive.

In summary, factors that influence decisions for enrollment rates of girls to basic education include, but are not limited to, income, social class of parents, rural or urban differences, marriage, and the many roles of women (Hyde, 1993). However, the mechanisms through which these factors operate are not always clear. Education is also given or denied based on each religion's concept of women and social status.

Summary

The aim of traditional education is to help the child grow into a functional member of his family, group, and society. Obedience to authority, good manners, and respect for the customs, taboos, and religious laws of the group are highly valued. Rigid gender-roles are followed, and both men and women enjoyed autonomy, each within their own limits.
Colonial educational policies, as introduced and implemented in Nigeria, did not serve the democratic purposes of education and the interests of those whose experiences are shaped by gender stereotyping. The negative impacts of colonial educational legacy notwithstanding, Mbefo (1996) warns that while it is not totally correct to blame the past for our present inadequacy, it is not correct to explain the present without the past. Adding her voice, Isichei (1976) holds that people will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors. Geyer (2004) agrees that looking outside for blame is a form of dependence. Instead, one must look for his or her blame to find one's independence. In a similar vein, Fiore (2004) advises that to get out of the victim mindset and not blame circumstances would be beneficial for one to decide what is truly important in life. "We are not a function of our environment, as we have often been led to believe. Instead we are a function of our decisions, or at least we can be if we choose" (p. 46). Although postindependent education in Nigeria is still struggling from the effects of the past, there is hope that equal access to education will be provided for all if proper planning is taken into consideration.

Overall, in considering available literature regarding the multiple factors that impacted women's access to education in Nigeria, it is pertinent to gain the insight of people who have experienced directly or indirectly this phenomenon, for individuals are their own "meaning makers" (Gunter, Estes, & Schwab, 1999, p. 365). White (2006) and Stephens (2000a) argue that education is essentially concerned with what happens to people because "stories do not mirror life; they shape it" (p. 1). The process involved in gaining the insights of people who have experienced the phenomenon of education in Nigeria is addressed in Chapter III, which is the research design.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the research design and methodology used in the study, the process involved in data collection, and procedure for data analysis. This phenomenological study was an attempt to understand the essence of women’s experiences with education in Nigeria. Cresswell (1998) and Crotty (2003) view phenomenology as the process of studying the meanings of lived experiences for several individuals about a phenomenon. It is about opening up and calling into question what is taken for granted about the current meanings regarding a phenomenon to see what emerges (p. 82). Phenomenology, both as a philosophy and research method, allows the exploration and description of particular phenomenon as a lived experience (Somkeh & Lewin, 2005; Speziale Streubert & Carpenter, 2003), when individuals place themselves in a state of consciousness free of everyday biases and beliefs (Gall et al., 2003) to offer perspectives and meanings on a phenomenon. Phenomenology, seen from this point of view, is a reflective enterprise.

Criteria for choosing or selecting an approach are based on three considerations (Creswell, 2003; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). These include the research problem, the researcher’s personal experience and concerns, and the audience for whom the report would be written. The phenomenon of women’s education in Nigeria is unique and capturing the social reality experienced by the participants is vital (Crotty, 2003, p. 131). Ary et al. (2002) insist that human experience is context-bound and takes its meaning
from, and is therefore inseparable from, social, historical, political, and cultural
influences (p. 424). Mischler (cited in Ary et al., 2002) argue that to avoid isolating or
stripping human experience from its context, gaining a person's subjective experience is
crucial. Monette et al. (2002) agree that human experience has a subjective dimension to
it. For one thing, it possesses the power to expose the very personal meanings and
feelings that people have about themselves, meanings or feelings that are critical in
capturing human experience.

Choice of this methodology rests on the attempt to gain the personal viewpoints
of the participants regarding their experiences of the phenomenon in question. Although
there are criticisms against reliance on person-centered approaches to data collection in
some quarters, Ayers (1995, cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) views subjectivity as
strength:

Far from a weakness, the voice of the person, the subject's own account presents
a singular strength. Life history and narrative are ancient approaches to
understanding human affairs—they are found in history, folklore, psychiatry,
medicine, music, sociology, economics, and of course, anthropology. (p. 25)

Qualitative research implies an emphasis on processes and meanings which are at
once objective and subjective, their objectivity and subjectivity being indissolubly bound
up with each other according to constructivist perspective (Crotty, 2003, p. 44;
Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 36). Bringing objectivity and subjectivity together and
holding them throughout the process is the core character of qualitative research.

Gaining information directly from women would help to avoid the limitations of
earlier research done in this field, which was often influenced by "the disproportionately
powerful role played by male officials in interpreting and representing female interests, which hinders progress in the area” (Stephens, 2000b, p. 2).

In the context of this study, developing a framework for analyzing gender equity is vital. Understanding how historical, educational, and cultural contexts played out in gender equity to access to education and participation regarding women was focal. Interviews were the means for data collection. This chapter also discusses the method employed to recruit participants for the study, selection of site, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures used in this study.

Site Selection

The site for data collection for this study was Nigeria. To represent the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, locations in the North, Southeast, and Southwest were selected for the study. This comprised University of Abuja and rural Gwagwalada (Federal Capital territory) in the North; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and rural Ugwuoba (Anambra State) in the Southeast; and Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State and Ibadan (Oyo State) in the Southwest. The rationale for selecting the site was based on the fact that it is the locale or domicile of the study population and the participants suited for the study.

Study Participants

To enhance the credibility of the study, identifying the participants who are knowledgeable and experienced (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and would have the greatest potential to yield good data would be ideal planning for any researcher (Marshall &
Rossman, 1995). Because it is essential that all participants (women who had access to education, and women who did not have access to education) experience the phenomenon being studied, purposeful selection based on criterion sampling was utilized (Creswell, 1998). For this study, a total of 24 women were recruited as participants. Twelve of them are currently university professors, and 12 others are uneducated (nonliterate) women who live in rural areas.

To have a diverse sample, participants were pooled based on certain demographic characteristics: age, cultural/ethnic, and religious affiliation representing Southeast, Southwest, and North of Nigeria which reflects the country’s geopolitical zones. The 12 professors were chosen from three different universities: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka located in the Southeast; Olabisi Onabanjo University in the Southwest; and University of Abuja in the North. The participants were drawn from the faculty of social sciences, comprising the different departments of education, sociology, and psychology. Their experiences offered variegated viewpoints, which enriched the phenomenon being studied.

Both the educated and nonliterate participants were approached initially via the scripts addressed to heads of departments meant for the recruitment targets. After the preliminary recruitment process was completed and potential participants declared their interest in the study, the researcher then contacted them personally. While the educated participants were contacted through university or personal email system and/or via phone, the uneducated participants were reached through phone calls or via the village women chairpersons. The researcher did not encounter any problems in establishing
rapport with potential participants, because he belongs to this culture and understands the relationship skills required to engage in dialogue with the study population.

Data Collection

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) advise that the decision for data collection method flows from research questions but may also be influenced by the context, structure, and timing of research. Precisely, the choice between naturally occurring or generated data depends on the researcher’s role and participant interpretation and consideration of, which are likely to shed more light on the research subject.

The art of skillful interviewing in order to generate quality data depends on the interviewer (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological interviews begin with social conversation to create a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for the participant. It is the responsibility of the researcher to make the interviewees feel comfortable so they can respond to questions without inhibitions (Moustakas, 1994). Because interviews “open up what is inside people” (Patton, 2002, p. 407), the personal presence of the interviewer may reduce the respondents’ spontaneity and willingness to be completely frank (Vockell & Asher, 1998); thus, the key feature is to combine structure with flexibility (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The primary method for collecting data was individual, face-to-face interviews. Interviews generate useful information about lived experience and its meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Open-ended questions were asked focusing on the research questions. To elicit informational adequacy (Ary et al., 2002), a description of the participants’ experiences in terms of family support, school environments, cultural barriers, impact of
education or lack of it as appropriate to the participants was explored. Questions focused on meanings to elicit the essence of the experience from the perspective of the participant (p. 448). The role of the researcher was to understand how, through experience, the phenomenon being studied appears to the consciousness of the participant (Giorgi, 1988). Subsequent interviews were arranged in case there was a need for clarification or in case any interruption occurred during the interview. Each interview session lasted for about 60 minutes.

However, for reasons of distance and/or time constraints, telephone interviews could be conducted solely at the request of the participant. The university professors chose their private offices in the universities as venues for the interviews. A private room in the village activities building, usually located in most rural areas, was reserved for those without formal education. Alternatively, for their convenience, the participants chose their private residences as venues for the interviews. Interview questions were made available to the participants 2 weeks before the interview date. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviewees were informed both verbally and in writing that audio recording would be utilized. They were also informed that the recording could be turned off completely or at intervals at their request. The researcher also planned to take notes occasionally to capture nonverbal gestures and behaviors. Interviews were conducted solely at the convenience of each participant.

It was anticipated that conducting the interviews would begin in August 2006 and be completed by October 2006, a period of 3 months, whereas the proposed study would be completed by August 2007. The findings of the study were to be disseminated as a doctoral dissertation to relate the outcome of the research. A token of a $20 cash
gift was disbursed as incentive and appreciation to the subjects for their participation in the study, regardless of whether the interview was completed or whether the interviewee quit.

Methods of Analysis

Having provided pastoral counseling services to clients for the past 12 years, the researcher has acquired some basic layperson’s skills in interviewing, assessment, data categorization, theme development, and coding (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111). Creswell (1998) holds that the “rationale for phenomenological study is to understand individuals by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as they see it” (p. 275). He also advocates that the first step in the process of data analysis is to set aside, as far as humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of the participants in the study. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from audiotapes. To protect the identity of participants, numbers were assigned to identify participants, as well as the audiotapes used for each participant.

Data reduction techniques involved listing all the significant statements, key words, and phrases as variables and constructs. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements and coded (Singleton & Straits, 2005). The aggregate of formulated meanings was organized into clusters and themes. Meanwhile, any repetitive or unnecessary information or overlapping data were eliminated. Categories were further analyzed seeking for textural description of the data. Finally, a summary of rich description that captured the essence of the participants’ experiences and viewpoints on women education emerged.
To verify the credibility of the interpretation, member-checking and peer-review procedures were employed. Participants were asked to review and critique the transcriptions. The researcher also shared the interpretations of the data with the participants to ensure accuracy.

Benefits of Research

As far as gender equity in education is concerned in SSA, most studies conducted by international agencies about the region have been generic in nature. Individual countries and people who experience the phenomenon needed to be studied because of each country's peculiarities. This study provides an opportunity to hear the voice of Nigerian women regarding their access (or lack of it) to education, and the barriers that hinder their participation in education. The present study is unique and important to the present-day Nigerian educational policy makers in general and Nigerian women in particular. Although there is no potential direct benefits to participants, exposing the cultural influences, barriers, and challenges, and understanding the factors responsible for underrepresentation of women regarding their participation in the education industry is critical to making institutional interventions.

Obtaining responses from the individuals who mostly experience the phenomenon could provide a framework for further research, as well as inform policy makers, educators, and students involved in decision-making process. Women's responses and assessment of their needs may impact and inform educational decisions, policies, planning, and implementation. The study may also help to create awareness and galvanize interest among women to assess situations that impede their educational
potentials and seek for opportunities to address the inequity that hinders them from reaching these potentials. Policy makers may also benefit from the study as they formulate educational policies that are more inclusive for both genders.

Risks to Subjects

Sensitive pieces of information were likely to come up during interviews sessions involving family support, overcoming barriers, school environments, or lack of support. Because participants could be elicited to recall their experiences as women in school, in a culture that treats them as less than men and as illiterates, there was a tendency to relive a trauma. Arrangements were made with university counseling centers in respective data collection sites to take care of the situation if such a need arose.

Furthermore, since the findings of the study would be disseminated through the process of a public dissertation, this posits another potential risk. Family members and acquaintances might have access to the dissertation and read sensitive information and associate that with any of the participants. To avoid this, the identities of participants were masked. Scheduling and arranging for interviews could also pose some inconveniences to the participants. However, participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any point during the interview. Because the researcher belongs to the culture in which the study was conducted, effort was made to ensure that none of the interviewees was anyone he knew personally.
Protection for Subjects

Because the findings of the study would be made public, participants were informed ahead of time that they reserved the right to choose which interview questions to answer. They may also elect to have their names used; otherwise the confidentiality of all the participants was ensured by using pseudonyms. The researcher planned to obtain a written permission if any participant agreed to have her name used in the study.

Confidentiality of Data

Pseudonyms were used to identify the participants. Participants were also encouraged to exclude from their responses any information that would identify them, for example, the name of university and job title. To ensure confidentiality of data in the course of the study, other identifying pieces of information were removed from the transcriptions. Data were safely stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the researcher, where only the researcher had access. To further ensure confidentiality of data, the audiotapes would be destroyed after transcription was completed and participants were confident that the researcher had accurately summarized their comments and responses. All raw data would be securely kept for a period of 3 years, after which they would be destroyed.

Instrumentation

Being the primary data collection instrument in this study, the researcher used an open-ended interview procedure to gain the perspective of the participants regarding
access to education and equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. The researcher also
developed interview outlines, which are attached (Appendices A and B). Components of
the interview outline included a set of issues to be explored with each participant based
on the research questions. Coding sheets were developed after data were collected since
it is the character of qualitative study to be emergent (Creswell, 2003, p. 199). It was not
pertinent to have developed coding sheets ahead of time.

Informed Consent Process

The researcher followed the guidelines of Human Subjects Institutional Review
Board (HSIRB) of Western Michigan University. The first step was to clearly explain
verbally and in writing the purpose of the research and the data collection procedure, and
to ask the potential participants if they were willing to participate. Initial invitation to
participate was sent to the potential participants. Further contacts were made with the
participants that responded in the affirmative. Meetings were arranged to review the
consent documents and discuss interview details. At the meeting, consent documents
were presented and explained in full. The participants had the option to decide to sign
the document or abstain from signing and discontinue with the interview. It was the
responsibility of the researcher to ensure that no one would participate in the interview
until the consent document had been reviewed and signed.

However, because of variations in the subjects for this study, (i.e., educated and
nonliterate), the researcher planned to obtain only a verbal consent from the uneducated
subjects. This helped minimize the complexity inherent in the consent document, which
could be problematic and confusing for the participants in this group. To achieve this, an
abridged consent form containing the key elements was read and explained to the participants in this group. Obtaining verbal consent served the purpose of supplanting their signatures.

Summary

Understanding people's perspectives of a particular situation and seeking out the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group is the goal of phenomenology (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Patton, 2002). This method provides a systematic, logical, and coherent resource for a researcher to engage in the analysis and synthesis of data that leads to essential descriptions of lived experience.

To explore the phenomenon under study and to answer the research questions, the researcher employed face-to-face, open-ended and in-depth approaches to interview 24 women. For the purpose of collecting meaningful data for this study and to avoid interfering with the interview process and interpretation of data, the researcher set aside all biases to allow a free flow of information from the perspectives of the participants.

Exploring the experiences of select Nigerian women regarding access to education and the barriers that hinder equal educational opportunity resulted in findings that brought out the essential, underlying meanings and content of the phenomenon under investigation. Chapter IV presents some demographic information about the participants, as well as reports the findings of the interviews as they relate to the research questions.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data collected for this study as well as report the findings. Face-to-face interviews were used to gather data from 24 Nigerian women. The interview sessions took place at the offices of the female professors and in the homes of the nonformally educated participants, respectively. The interview guide questions designed to reflect the research questions were utilized to conduct the interviews, while allowing for free flow of information. The key feature was to combine structure with flexibility (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) in order to elicit the needed data from the participants while at the same time making it comfortable for them to express themselves. Member checks and peer reviews were employed to ensure the accuracy of data collected from the participants.

Participants

The participants in this study were Nigerian women. The sample consisted of 24 women. While 12 of them were university professors teaching in different universities located in the Southeast, Southwest, and Northern regions of Nigeria, 12 others were not formally educated, but had only traditional upbringing. Like their educated counterparts, the 12 uneducated (nonliterate) participants were recruited from the Southeast, Southwest, and North of Nigeria. The educated participants were drawn from
the faculty of social sciences, comprising the different departments of education, sociology, and psychology.

Because it was essential that all participants (women who had access to education, and women who did not have access to education) have experience of the phenomenon being studied, purposeful selection based on criterion sampling was employed (Creswell, 1998).

The decision to recruit participants from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria was predicated on gaining some insight across religious, ethnic, and other sociocultural factors that either helped women to gain access to education or denied them access. Identifying these factors that confront women as they accessed or were denied education from different regions of Nigeria would offer variegated viewpoints which would enrich the phenomenon being studied. The age range of participants would also help to keep track of educational trends across generations of women in the country in recent years.

*Demographics of the Educated Participants*

The average age of the educated participants was 39 years, while the range was 38. All the educated participants had at least a master's degree; five have obtained their doctorates. By ethnic origin, 4 were Igbos, 5 were Yorubas, while 3 were Hausas. By religious affiliation, 10 were Christians, while 2 were Moslems.
Demographics of the Nonliterate Participants

The average age of nonliterate participants was 54, while the range was 55. Based on ethnic origin, 4 were Igbos, 4 were Yorubas, while 4 were Hausas. By religious affiliation, 5 were Christians, while 7 were Moslems.

Before presenting the findings, the researcher will examine how research work is perceived in the target population for this study.

Research Experience

My field trips gave me the opportunity to gather a rich mass of information for this study. There is a widespread and carefree attitude about keeping to scheduled time. Most of my participants, especially the educated group, did not keep to the scheduled time. This is not surprising for someone who is from the culture and fully understands poor time management skills prevalent in the culture. It comes as no surprise also because of poor leadership roles in the civil service, political instability, and executive rascality on the part of elected officials. This can be frustrating, especially when one has limited time and resources to conduct the research. Furthermore, it is a practical lesson on the virtue of patience.

During the interview, my participants expressed their interest in my research area and promptly opened up for conversation. They shared their experiences, struggles, and hopes. They were especially delighted that someone was listening respectfully to their voices. All through the interview, I assumed the attitude of a learner and assured them that their voices were important for my research. Overall, I learned a great deal about the
nature of qualitative research and the attendant flexibility required in making it worthwhile.

The researcher wanted his audience to hear the voices of Nigerian women regarding women's education. In order to talk meaningfully about how life's experiences shape one's work and destiny, a storied approach that is descriptive, personal, and concrete is required (Benham, 1997). The following themes emerged from the interviews.

**Emergent Themes**

After extensive data reduction techniques involving listing all the significant statements, key words, and phrases as variables and constructs, eliminating repetitive or unnecessary information or overlapping data, meanings were formulated from the significant statements and coded (Singleton & Straits, 2005). Presentation of the aggregate of these formulated meanings organized into clusters, themes, and subthemes followed. The analyzed data were organized into two sections for the nonliterate group and the educated group, respectively.

*Emergent Themes for the Nonliterate Participants*

The major themes for the nonliterate group include the following: (a) poverty and ignorance on the part of parents; (b) lack of trust, fear of teachers and foreigners; (c) separate orientation—household chores, farm work and housekeeping, and preparing for marriage is all that girls are expected to do; (d) girls' education as an investment does not benefit the immediate family; (e) education is a precious investment; (f) cultural
capital on boys to continue family lineage and, therefore, they are given better life opportunities; (f) education enhances economic and social capital of women; (g) religious education is priority. To highlight the perspectives of the participants on the themes and subthemes, a detailed analysis is presented below.

Theme 1: Poverty and ignorance of parents regarding the value of formal education were responsible for women's limited access to education.

Virtually all the nonliterate participants reported that scarcity of money and ignorance of the value of education was responsible for the inability of these women to have access to education. Ijeoma’s story stood out very clear. She was from a family of six siblings, five girls and one boy. In her words, “There was not enough money to send all the children to school, so only my brother was sponsored.” After her brother graduated, he was gainfully employed and resided in a city that had hospital facilities and other amenities. “It happened that when my dad took ill, my brother took my father to a hospital to be treated. While my father was recuperating, my brother took him to his office.” It was during that visit that my father saw some women doing similar work traditionally reserved for men.

These women had offices and desks like my brother. That incident changed my father’s mind. As soon as he returned home, he decided that all his girl children should go to school. Initially, it was ignorance that made my father not to send his girl children to school.

I was the only person who did not go to school because I had passed the age for grade school at that time. I felt the pain when I realized what lack of education has deprived me of.
Ijeoma stated that even though she was not able to personally have access to education, she did whatever it would take to send all her girl children to school despite her own husband’s resistance.

While it was always argued that costs were the sole reason for not sending girls to school, Chinyere’s story is another example of deliberate deprivation of access to education that was not finance-related. She came from a family of six siblings, three girls and three boys. Her father was a businessman and had enough money to send all of them to school, but only the boys had access to education. According to Chinyere, “The girls were not educated because my mother was complaining that she would not have anyone to help her with household work if the girls were to go to school.” Chinyere revealed that although her mother regretted this decision afterwards, it was too late for that to be remedied. “It is even more painful that I am not able to hold any position in my church, although I am very active in my church; it is because I cannot read or write,” she maintained.

*Theme 2: Lack of trust and fear of teachers/foreigners.*

Eight out of 12 respondents reported that their parents did not send them to have formal education because they were afraid of the foreign teachers who, for the most part, populated the teaching staff at the time. The teachers were sent by missions and, in most cases, were not familiar to members of the community. In general, parents did not trust the safety of their children in the hands of these foreigners. Bisi’s story was very illustrative. “My parents were not enlightened regarding education, and they were afraid to send us to school because they believed that the teacher would carry (kidnap) us
away." But Bisi and her four sisters attended Islamic education (Koranic studies; ABD Olope). Her two brothers were allowed to attend formal schooling. "I still feel bad that I did not go to school; I feel like I am at a loss, why they believed only the girls could be kidnapped is still a puzzle to me."

Theme 3: Separate orientation like doing household chores, farm work and housekeeping, and preparing for marriage was all that girls were expected to do.

Cultural expectation and roles’ assignment along sex lines can limit or enhance access to education (King & Hill, 1993). A total of 11 participants mentioned that there was a clear-cut demarcation of roles and expectations inherent in the way they were raised in comparison with their male siblings. Oduko revealed:

When I consciously reflect on the way I was raised as a girl, I am inclined to believe that I was not expected to be like boys; I was always asked to behave like a girl, even my mother does not mince words about this.

For example, it is the responsibility of girls to do housework and hawk vegetables and other farm produce around the village square in order to supplement income to the family. "My mother told me that she was just training me how to take care of my own family when I get married and have my own children."

Another participant, Tokumbo, concurred: "When I was young, I used to sell groundnuts, while the boys followed my parents to the farm; after selling groundnuts, I would cook food and take it to the farm for my father and brothers." "It is also my responsibility to fetch water and keep the house and entire compound clean."

Okinmgba’s story was pathetic. She narrated how hawking did her family a lot of harm. She recounted how two of her sisters got pregnant while in this business of hawking.
Hawking goods does expose girls unnecessarily to the effect that some indecent people take advantage of them. "My two sisters got pregnant at the hands of unknown predators who enticed them with money, and that brought a big shame to the family."

Notwithstanding the negative effects of hawking and other roles given to women, it was, however, an overwhelming perception among the participants that some orientations were proper to each sex group because men and women are different in some respects.

*Theme 4: Girls' education as an investment does not benefit the immediate family, that is, family of birth.*

Virtually all the participants personally reported having heard their parents or extended family members insist that the education of women was another family's benefit. In fact, some did mention that instead of sponsoring a girl, a whole community would contribute and make sure a boy was given a scholarship for the community's recognition and pride. Kayode's story was very telling. She said:

They don't believe in sending girls to school because if they do, they still have to marry into another family; and because my parents experienced high infant (girls) mortality, it did not make sense to send them to school since they were not sure of their survival. So they sent only the boys to school and trained them because they belong to the family. Besides, the girls would be married out and the family of marriage will become the beneficiaries of the investment.

Fumilayo shared a similar story when she said, "Well, they believe it is useless to educate a girl because she belongs to another family and will not benefit parents." In other words, the dividends of education do not benefit the parents and family of birth, and therefore the investment is not worth it.
Theme 5: Education is a precious investment without which economic and social capital of women cannot be elevated.

The value of education in contributing to the well-being of the individual, as well as the community, was stressed by all the participants. Actually, the particular interview question that probed into the benefit of having education was greeted with enthusiasm. Mary, one of the participants, recounted that “Even a blind person could smell the benefits of education.” She continued: “Education is light; and by light, I mean transformation, not just economic or social, but total in the sense that you increase in self-awareness and it gives you confidence.”

When asked to compare an educated woman and an uneducated woman, Ronke said:

There is a difference between a trained and skilled person and an untrained person; an uneducated person can be likened to a workman who uses only one kind of instrument for different kinds of work because she has no other, but an educated woman is skilled in the sense that she operates within a wider horizon.

Joy, a 30-year-old participant, spoke about the financial edge that an educated woman has over an uneducated woman. In general, an uneducated woman is not very financially stable when compared with an educated woman. An educated woman depends on her salary, but lack of a steady source of income can make an uneducated woman especially vulnerable. “Education has a way of stabilizing a woman financially,” Joy surmised. Of particular interest to almost all of the respondents was the social capital that women gain if they are educated. Nneka, a 42-year-old participant said, “From personal experience, a woman who is educated is respected by her family, husband, and
other people because they believe she knows something, and when she speaks, people listen.” She continued:

Having formal education is important; educated people get more attention than uneducated; for example, when we attend political meetings, the educated ones among us get more attention because they can read and write; and with their many titles they can go places, but I cannot. And when you are uneducated, sometimes you are denied your rights even without your knowledge of it.

One participant told me bluntly that my question about the benefit of education had an obvious answer. She literally asked me, “If I were educated, would you be talking to me through an interpreter?” She concluded by saying that education was the best investment any parents could give to their children.

*Subtheme 1: In polygamous families, educated wives enjoy social prestige over their uneducated counterparts.*

Several participants observed that in some cases where a man is married to more than one wife, the husband, more often than not, considers the educated wife fit company for attending social events and parties. Azuka spoke about how this creates rivalry among the wives as to who is loved more, or less, by the husband. According to her, it also creates an inferiority complex on the part of wives without formal education.

*Theme 6: There is cultural capital on boys to continue the family lineage and, therefore, they are given better life opportunities.*

Ten out of the 12 interviewees revealed that most of their girl siblings like themselves did not go to school because there was not enough money to send all the children. They did admit that, in most cases, only the boys were sent to school. But I argued that there must be something more than just not enough money, otherwise both
girls and boys could have been given equal access regardless of cost. The researcher literally asked them why there was money to send boys to school and no money to send girls. Iruka, a 50-year-old, said:

As you know, during that period, it is widely believed that educating women will only be useful to the community where she is married to. That is why the mentality then was to educate only men who it is believed will be useful to the immediate community.

Another insightful viewpoint came from Gloria:

The boys, they believe, would be there always and bear their family (of birth) name forever. For example, if a man has a son and dies, the son is expected to inherit and continue the lineage, unlike the woman who is married to another family.

Boys are preferred over the girls because of the cultural belief that they continue the family lineage, while girls may be married out to other families.

Theme 7: Religious education aimed at inculcating good morals was priority at the time.

The common voice that resonated in this theme was that religious education was in vogue at the time most of the participants were still young. Eight of the 12 participants acknowledged that most parents sent their girl children for Koranic studies in order to inculcate in them the principles of their religion. Julia recounted that they were well-trained in Islamic study such that they were expected to do their prayers always and be very loyal to the parents and elders. She maintained that they were so well-taught that “Till today, I always remember what they taught us in earlier stages and I never forget to go for Jumat prayer every Friday.” Ten out of 12 participants believed that religious studies were necessary but incomplete without formal education. Some of
them still blamed it on the ignorance of parents regarding the benefits of formal education.

However, most of them revealed that wise parents who adjust to trends in today's world are providing their children with both sacred and secular education. Julia insisted that “No parent can provide one type of education without limiting her children’s opportunity today.”

Emergent Themes for the Educated

The major themes from the data for the educated group include: (a) family background; (b) education as empowerment; (c) cultural negativity on girl child; (d) men’s perception of an educated woman as a threat; (e) religion supports women’s education but, in actual life, tends to give more voice to men in churches; and (f) early marriage impedes girls' education.

Theme 1: Family background was the motivator and single most important factor for having access to education.

All the participants in this group owe their access to education to their family background. Either parent was a teacher or a civil servant and, therefore, must have been educated. The story of Christiana was breathtaking. She is a Ph.D. holder in developmental psychology. She came from a family of four girl siblings. When asked what motivated her to go to school, she said:

Actually, it is a long story, but I will cut it short. I am from a family of four girls. We are all girls. My mother faced a problem because she had four girls and no boy at all. When my father died, my father’s family (relatives) did not really want us to be with them. So, actually, my mother was ejected from the house with the
four of us. And they usually tell us, the people are not Yoruba, so what can we do with them? Very soon now, they will all be pregnant and be going about. So, they cannot make it. So they threw us out. I was 5 years old when my father died. I am the last-born. So, my mother decided to take us to her father’s compound, and when I grew up and had the knowledge of it, I said, “Ha, oh!” I must strive. I must put everything I have to get to the peak of my career so that when those people who say that girls are no children will see me in (the) future, which is what is happening now, they will know that girls are even better than boys. It is from this situation that I got my drive to go to school.

Somehow through hard work, determination, and resilience, Christiana and her three sisters have, at least, first degree, and are all married and gainfully employed. Christiana did not have any financial support or otherwise from relatives. Instead, what she and her sisters experienced was very negative. She added, “My father’s relatives even tried to discourage my mother from sending us to school because we were girls.” Overall, it was through determination that Christiana’s mother was able to offer education to her girls.

Another story buttressing the importance of family background came from May. May is a 33-year-old lady, married, with just one child. She said:

Having access to education is the normal thing I met in the family. I think it is the normal thing to do in my family. My father was then a primary school teacher. Then, all of us, men and women, were given equal access to having education and to any other thing in the family.

Eight out of 12 respondents declared that their mothers were responsible for day-to-day encouragement that was required to make it through education. As far as the participants were concerned, family background, where at least either parent was educated, was the pivotal factor/motivation that enabled their access to and participation in education. For all the participants, family support, which included both that of parents and husbands, was vital.
Theme 2: To be educated is to be empowered.

Practically all the participants were in accord that education is an instrument of empowerment, especially for women. Evelyn remarked, “When you have education, you are empowered. When you give a woman education, you empower the woman.” When asked to give a break down of what she meant by empowerment, Angel said: “Education is rewarding financially, reduces poverty, emancipates women, and enhances your social outlook, and gives you fulfillment, and limits housewifezation.”

All the participants were happy that they were educated because it gave them some sense of self-worth, not just in the community, but also in their immediate households. Evelyn indicated she was proud to contribute to the economic well-being of her family, adding that, “I can’t be regarded as a consumer even by my husband.” All the participants declared they were happy in their present jobs, which would not have been possible if they did not have access to education. Overall, they see a strong link between education and a better life for women in Nigeria.

Subtheme 1: Being educated enhances a woman’s chances to marry a man of relative higher status.

Most participants recounted that if it were not for their education, they would not be able to marry the kind of men they were married to. With education, people believe that you have a better chance of understanding how to manage a home than an uneducated woman, raise children properly, bearing in mind the developmental stages that children go through. They also acknowledged (although it does not apply in all
cases) that an educated woman understands the implications of health and hygiene issues better.

Theme 3: Cultural perception (negativity) of the girl child as subordinate is still in vogue, but education is gradually leveling the playing ground.

Seven out of the 12 participants narrated that their personal experiences would make them strongly believe that women’s roles and workloads tend to make them subordinate to men. Most of them indicated that cultural expectations of women as “people to be seen and not heard” still persist. Most agreed that while growing up they were always told that the role of women was restricted to the kitchen. They generally said that the culture gave room for women to be enslaved. Regardless of the cultural background of the participants, they affirmed that men go with the perception that women are inferior to men as can be found in the expression that men make to their wives: “I married you with my money.” This kind of mindset governs their behavior toward women.

Aduke recounted her experience while in the university. It was on a rag day, when students were allowed to dress funny and beg for alms from the public to ameliorate the plight of the less privileged within the university community. She was going in a group of other girls. She remembered specifically how one man who got mad at them asked angrily, “Why should you go to the University?” Aduke emphasized that the anger and rejection written on that man’s countenance simply translated to how strongly he felt against women attaining university education.
The consensus was that if a woman did not come from a family that valued education, chances were that she would get married early, rather than being encouraged to have access to education. Women’s roles were also pivotal in determining the time element as to whether and when she would finish her education. However, most of the participants recounted that marrying an educated husband had been a big help in terms of moral support and understanding. Across subcultures, parents seem to have a higher economic premium on boys than girls, but the tide is changing. Parents who have benefited economically from the education of their female children have themselves become vanguards of women’s education.

Theme 4: In general, men perceive educated women as a threat.

The participants pointed out that society in general, and men in particular, perceive educated women as a threat to men’s authority and control. The culture frowns at any woman who stays longer in school, like aspiring to get a Ph.D. They said that, generally, most men were afraid that allowing woman to gain access to education would make them “master in the home.” Funke’s story was informative:

In my own case, after my B.Sc. program, I told my mom that I was going for my master’s degree. She asked me, “Is this master’s program, marriage? What are you waiting for? They see you as someone who does not want to get married; they see you as a deviant. When are you getting married, after your education?” She continued, “They see you as an outcast; she wants to be on top of the man. The culture, especially in this west part of Nigeria, can tolerate you to your first degree level. And after that they see you as going beyond your limit. They begin to question: ‘What do you want? Do you want to be a man? What do you need a second degree for?’ They frown at you especially when you are not married yet. They believe you want to control the man.” They accuse the woman of being too proud. A lot of family meetings were called because I wanted to get a second degree. They questioned why I did not want to
get married. This is the kind of thing our culture is doing to women. If my mind was not made up, I would have stopped at that level.

Hilda asserted that "education presented a common pedestal on which both men and women (husband and wife) can rise to any level they want, but most men do not like it."

*Theme 5: Religion supports women's education but in actual life tends to give more voice to men in churches.*

Although a few of the participants were outspoken about the issue of religion, most were very cautious about what they said and sought for clarification of what I meant by whether their religion supported the education of women. Overall, most of them affirmed that their religion supported women education. A case in point was Hilda's viewpoint. She said, "Christian religion is not against girls' education; rather it tries to encourage the education of both male and female children, but your gender can come in when it comes to participation in church activities." Most of the participants did not see any discrimination between males and females in their religions as evidenced in places of worship. However, they acknowledged that there might be limits and boundaries as to what men and women could do. Hilda continued: "Maybe a woman cannot become a senior pastor, especially when you are married. It is only a limit; the pace at which women can move may differ when compared to their male counterpart."

Jide, a senior lecturer, stated that her religion emphasized role assignments. According to her, "My education should not make me go against the expectations of my religion, but should help me live it out." She went on to say that "Being a senior lecturer should not make me less a mother; I have different frontiers on which my success should
be rated; my family should not suffer because I have a Ph.D.” For Jide, her education was meant to better the lot of her family. She believes that her religion encourages women’s education so that women might enhance their potential. If any discrimination does exist, it is a carry-over from the culture, or a misinterpretation of the religious texts themselves.

Theme 6: Early marriage impedes girls’ education.

Unilaterally, the participants agreed that early marriage impedes girls’ education. However, the participants’ understanding of early marriage was relative to their cultural background because of some religious precepts regarding age of marriage. The common response, though, was that any marriage that would impede access to formal education of the girl child would be considered early marriage. Most of the participants advocated that the earliest time for a woman to consider marriage would be after her first degree in the university.

Theme 7: Indigenous education must be open to the reality of a changing world.

This theme emerged from the specific research question across both populations. The educated respondents saw a lot of values and morals in the way that girls were raised traditionally, but suspect that strict role stratification limits girls’ educational opportunities and chances of survival. A good blend of what is good in traditional upbringing should be preserved, while at the same time embracing the values of Western-style education. Hilda did not mince words in categorizing the situation of a woman without education in the 21st century. She said, “A girl without education today has no
future; in fact she has no prospects in life. She and her children will suffer severe
economic and social setback."

Nonliterate respondents stated consistently that “Traditional education helps to
cultivate respect, obedience, and family harmony, but it is incomplete today without the
school education; there is power in school education; it teaches how to do things in a
better way.” Lack of education has created a big social and economic gap between
literate and nonliterate women.

Data collected and themes developed from the data analysis provided the
information needed to answer the research questions.

Review of Research Questions

As stated earlier, the central question for this phenomenological study is: What is
the experience of Nigerian women with regard to access and participation in formal
education? Because the participants were comprised of two groups (the formally
educated and the nonliterate), the research questions were specifically structured to elicit
appropriate responses from each group. The interview questions were deliberately
structured to answer the research questions.

Research Questions for Nonliterate Participants

Research Question 1: Who or what is responsible for women’s lack of access to
formal education?

Besides costs, ignorance of the value of education on the part of parents was
critical to women’s lack of access to education. The priority for parents at the time was
to prepare their girl children for household responsibilities and, eventually, marriage.

None of the parents of the nonliterate participants was educated.

Most of the participants did acknowledge that their male siblings gained access to education, and because of the scarcity of money, women could not be sent to school. When asked why they thought that the reason for not training women during that time was due to poverty, whereas boys were sponsored, Gloria said, “I think it is due to poor orientation, because if it were due to poverty, the families would have managed to train girls as they do in training boys.” Ignorance and cost were the critical factors that hindered access to education for all the nonliterate participants.

*Research Question 2:* In what way(s) do women’s cultural or religious roles affect their inability to have access to formal education?

For most participants, role orientation, cultural expectation, and social status may have contributed to women’s limited access to education in general. Those expectations would include preparation for marriage and belief or reasoning that the woman would be married to another family which would make the investment in the education of the girl child not worthwhile. Most of the participants reported that their religions were in support of women education, except that some people misperceive the role of religion and interpret that differently for their immediate gratification.

However, they all indicated that times have changed and that most parents now see a greater need to educate girls than boys because of its economic benefits to both family of birth and marriage. All the participants stressed the importance of indigenous education because “That is what made us what we are; indigenous education teaches you to respect your parents, elders, and husband, and trains you how to raise your family.”
Research Question 3: Does having access to formal education make a difference in the lives of women? In other words, what would women do differently if they had access to formal education?

All the participants affirmed that access to education was a condition without which women cannot be both economically dependent and socially improved. Many admitted that if they still have the opportunity, they would avail themselves of the opportunity to learn how to read and write. They affirmed that access and participation in education was critical to women's economic well-being and social status.

Research Questions for Participants Who Had Access to Formal Education

Research Question 1: Who or what influenced women's ability to have access to formal education?

All the participants reported that family background, that is, family of birth and family of marriage, was instrumental to having access to education. The family of birth, where either the father or mother (or both) were educated, played a huge role in determining their ability to have access to education. In the family of marriage, most husbands were supportive of the women in graduate-level studies. Sheer personal determination to succeed, hard work, and perseverance were prominent in all the participants' stories and academic circumstances. Overall, the participants reported that more mothers than fathers were strong family figures that supported their education.

Research Question 2: What experiences, supports, and/or challenges did women encounter in schools?
This particular question did not yield any significant findings. A few participants reported that they experienced challenges that threatened their educational career, but none was significant enough to frustrate their educational goals. Furthermore, 8 of the 12 women interviewed reported that their parents were all educated. Some of the parents were principals, teachers, or nurses, and teaching in or nearby schools attended by their children, which directly or indirectly provided some measure of protection to the students at the time.

*Research Question 3: What is the impact of formal education on Nigerian women?*

Participants were unanimous in affirming the benefits of having access to formal education. Education is a right which must not be denied any child regardless of sex. According to them, it enhances the economic well-being of the family and community, and elevates the social worth of the educated woman. The participants concurred that education is a life-changing undertaking that has to be within the reach of every child.

*Research Question 4: How, or in what way(s), did parents and extended family member(s) support women’s education?*

Most of the participants indicated that immediate family members such as parents and husbands were supportive of their educational careers from initial access to graduate level. Ten of the 12 educated participants revealed that their mothers were the pillars of their educational accomplishments. Areas of support ranged from financial assistance to emotional and moral support. They generally claimed that their mothers helped them to cultivate relationship dynamics and discipline that facilitated their interaction with peers, teachers, and staff, which enabled them to achieve their academic goals. In the words of
one of the participants, "The story of my educational career cannot be complete without the positive role of my mother." Another woman put it so aptly: "I owe my access to education, my ability to complete, my present position which would not have been possible without education, to my mother; and I will do my best to educate generations to come." Overall, most of the educated participants acknowledged the role of their families of birth in their ability to have access to education. Family of marriage also played a significant role in supporting most of the participants to attain graduate-level education.

Comparable Question Across Both Populations

Research Question: What is the role of indigenous education in women's upbringing?

This particular research question was used to compare the two groups to determine their assessment of the values of indigenous education in relation to formal education. Participants in both populations did acknowledge the value of indigenous education. Consistently, the participants stated that through indigenous education children cultivated respect for their parents, elders, and their environments. As one participant put it, "Indigenous education gives you your identity. It is what defines you within the ambience of your culture." However, most of the participants opposed some aspects of indigenous education practices that tend to make women inferior to men. Furthermore, their opinion was widespread in affirming that indigenous upbringing today would be incomplete without formal education. Some integration is critical for the economic and social well-being of women.
Summary

Chapter IV presented the interview process, gave a brief description of the participants, related the themes that emerged from the interviews, as well as reported the findings of the study. The emergent themes for both the nonliterate and the educated groups were also discussed in relation to the research questions. This chapter also reported some of the key stories and excerpts that stood out from the interviews. A review of the research questions was also presented. Chapter V contains the summary, discussion of findings, recommendations for future research, implications for practitioners, and conclusions.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a general summary and provides a discussion emanating from the data analysis and results of the study. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations were offered regarding need for further research, and implications suggested to education practitioners, policy makers, and nongovernmental organizations that have particular interest in women’s education. The conclusions are also presented in this section.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of 24 Nigerian women with regard to access and participation in formal education in Nigeria. The study also assessed the barriers that hinder equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. An overview of women’s education on global, Sub-Saharan Africa, and regional levels still indicates that more women lag behind in access to education than men. Limited accesses to education and deprivation of equal educational opportunities have kept women, families, and societies in Nigeria and SSA economically poorer and have denied women from reaching their full educational potential (World Bank, 2003).

The first chapter provided general background information on women’s education in SSA as well as in Nigeria. Eight major research questions guided the study.
Chapter II provided a review of relevant literature in which the historical moments that characterized Nigerian education and sociocultural and religious factors that affect access to education were considered. Chapter III outlined the methodology for the study. This included the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures. A total of 24 participants comprising 12 nonliterate and 12 educated women were interviewed for the study. Data were analyzed and coded as themes and subthemes. Research questions were also reviewed.

Discussion of Findings

Studies on women's education in SSA have revealed that the patriarchal family system which encouraged preference of boy children over girl children has contributed to giving more educational opportunities to boys than girls. The findings of previous researchers like Yamundow (2001), Obasi (2000), and King and Hill (1993) underscored that poverty, gender-biased tradition, religion, subordinate roles of women, early marriage, and parental attitude account for disparity in education to the disadvantage of women. Global agencies like the UNESCO (2002) and the World Bank Group (2003) reporting on SSA indicated that women's productivity/potential was hampered by widespread inequality in education and access to essential services and skills between males and females.

For the nonliterate participants in this study, parental ignorance of the value of formal education, cost of education, and the cultural preoccupation to prepare women for marriage were the strongest characteristics found. Most of the participants regretted
their inability to have access to education, adding that access to education would have provided better living conditions/standards for themselves and their families.

For the educated participants, family background and support from relatives was important. The single most significant factor/motivator that made access to education possible for the participants was that one or both parents of the participants were educated. This is consistent with the findings of Yamundow (2001), who reported in her study that family members, as well as the individual's motivation, were sources of support (Samuels, 2005). Participants in this study reported that their mothers were essential sources of moral and financial support during their school years.

Previous research studies conducted by Yamundow (2001) and Bakaar (1999) found that the multiple roles women play in the family and society posed a barrier to women's education. In this study, however, gender-stratified roles helped to differentiate and demarcate chores among males and females and were not found to be a threat.

Early marriage was found to be a barrier to women's education. This is consistent with the findings of Yamundow (2001) and Bakaar (1999) in their separate research studies conducted about women's education in The Gambia. Although most of the participants did not agree on what exactly the construct meant because of differing religious precepts on age regarding marriage, the researcher clarified the construct to mean any marriage that would pose a threat to having access to basic education.

Contrary to the findings of Bakaar (1999) and Yamundow (2001), religion did not count as a barrier to women's education in this study. Most of the participants in this study acknowledged that their various religions and denominations support women's education both in principle and in practice. This conclusion is consistent with the findings
of Robertson (cited in King & Hill, 1993), who held that although Islamic religion did not pose a threat to women’s education in Senegal, it was a barrier to their education in northern Nigeria. He considered religion as a neutral factor in regard to women’s education.

The comparable question across both populations yielded a significant finding. All of the participants acknowledged the value of indigenous education, but unanimously stated that it would be incomplete without formal education in a fast-changing world. They all advocated the need for formal education as key for women’s development. This result corroborates the research findings of Nguyen (2000) who indicated that creating favorable conditions for women to be educated at all class levels and ethnicities and to have employment opportunities enables them to achieve their educational potentials.

Overall, the findings of this study regarding parental ignorance or lack of information of the value of formal education, lack of trust of foreign teachers, and the value of indigenous education as they affect women’s access to education in Nigeria are new frontiers that have added to the body of knowledge. The findings in this study have also identified several themes for future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

There still remains a need for further research on the barriers that affect women’s education in Nigeria. Most studies on women’s education in SSA have employed qualitative methods. Future research may consider a mixed method approach. Furthermore, a study focusing on a particular ethnic group may throw more light on details and dynamics that were not available in this study. Equally, a study utilizing men
as participants may lead to a wider discussion or dialogue on the issue of women's education, especially in regions where denial of access to education seems widespread.

Implications for Practitioners

Following the results of this study, ensuing implications are proffered to development agencies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations in their mission to make education accessible to all women.

In line with the UNESCO (1999a) principle of acceptability and adaptability, global agencies concerned with women's education should do well to consider and validate the cultures of the recipients of education as a valuable component. No educator can ignore the fact that culturally appropriate curricula and prior knowledge stimulates motivation and leads to learning and ownership. As they carry on their campaign to provide education for all, effort has to focus on issues personally relevant to the recipients instead of emphasizing foreign-based curricula and worldview, which characterized education during the colonial era aimed at perpetuating the interest of churches and European trade. Parents and students at that time failed to see the relevance of the education presented to them because they were completely alienated from their culture, tradition, and identity. Educators may use students' prior knowledge as a foundation to teach new concepts by engaging students in critical reflection on indigenous cultures vis-à-vis other cultures (Srikantaiah, 2005; World Bank, 2005).

Both in the present and the future, practitioners must understand that providing appropriate curricula equips students to talk back to the world, as it is supposed to be rooted in pupils' needs and experiences (Bigelow et al., 1994). Education has to be
flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural setting.

Systematic change is required within the institutional structure to encourage, support, and involve successful women in the decision-making process to serve as role models to other women. Governments and society in general should encourage and create appropriate conditions for women to speak out on their aspirations, ideas, and objectives (Nguyen, 2000), as well as employ poverty alleviation measures to make education accessible.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to assess the viewpoints of educated and nonliterate women on the sociocultural factors that affect access to, and participation of, Nigeria women in education. Conducted to better understand the experiences of select Nigerian women regarding women’s education, this study focused on religious and cultural factors that hinder or promote participation as it relates to women’s access to education or lack of it in Nigeria. Previous studies except Yamundow (2001) had utilized gathering generic information regarding dropout rates of girls, faulting poverty as the underlying factor for low enrollment of girls in schools. Summarily, their findings point to how gender norms create disparities in power, autonomy, and well-being, typically to the disadvantage of females (Murphy, 2003).

In this study, the researcher specifically wanted his audience to hear the voices of Nigerian women, those who have been denied access and those who did have access to
education. It was one of the goals of this study to highlight the benefits of education as well as expose the disadvantages that lack of access may engender.

Results of the study revealed that education is a key factor for human development for all the participants. Findings indicate that educated women have a higher sense of fulfillment than their uneducated counterparts. The nonliterate participants did not convey a similar sense of self-worth and fulfillment. Although they did not necessarily admit being inferior to their educated counterparts, they believed that the latter have a social and economic advantage over them. All the participants advocated making education accessible to all girls regardless of socioeconomic background.

It is important to observe that trends are changing and that more girls have access to basic education today. Nowadays, parents have experienced the huge benefits of educating girls who not only support their family of birth but also their family of marriage. Furthermore, most parents would rather ensure that their female children are given equal or more educational opportunity than their male children.

Notwithstanding the changing trends, most of the participants called for serious efforts on the part of governments, agencies, and individuals to salvage the plight of young girls who are victims of abuses ranging from early marriage, to child labor, to prostitution. They all advocated for provision of education for all where gender and/or sex do not limit people or inhibit access to education.
Appendix A

Interview Outline for Nonliterate Participants
Interview Questions for Participants Without Formal Education

I. Background information
   a. Explanation of research and assurance of protection and identification as contained in the proposal
   b. Demographics: Age, ethnicity, marital status, financial status, religious affiliation, and work experience

II. Barriers: Familial/cultural/religious factors that impeded access to education
   a. How many members of your family had access to education?
   b. How many did not have access to education?
   c. Is there any family member who did not like the idea of formal education?
   d. What is your role as a woman in your family when compared with your male siblings?
   e. Are your parents supportive of formal education of women in contrast to traditional education?
   f. Does your religion support the education of women?
   g. Explore how a woman is expected to behave within the context of your religion?
   h. Did your religious upbringing or teaching promote or hinder your education?
   i. Can you tell me how your religion regards men and women in terms of social status? Are both men and women regarded and treated equally?
   j. In what way did your traditional upbringing help you to be who and what you are?

III. Impact of lack of access to education
   a. Do you see any benefits/advantages or disadvantages in the education of women?
   b. Do you see any difference between an educated woman and an uneducated woman in terms of life style and opportunities? That is, do you think there is a difference between a woman educated in the traditional way and formal way?
c. Do you think you would have a better standard of living and enhanced social status if you were educated?

d. Do you think life would be different, in fact, be better, if you had the opportunity to be educated?
Appendix B

Interview Outline for Educated Participants
Interview Outline for Female Professors (Educated Participants)

I. Background information
   a. Explanation of research and assurance of protection and identification as contained in the proposal
   b. Demographics: Age, ethnicity, marital status, financial status, religious affiliation, and work experience

II. What motivated you to go to school?
   a. How many members of your family were educated?
   b. How many women in your family had access to education?
   c. What role does your family play in your education?
   d. Who inspired your (access) going to school?
   e. Identify family support systems, individuals, groups, and/or organizations that facilitated your education.
   f. Explain how family members supported or impeded your education.

III. What is the impact of gaining education in your life?
   a. Do you see any link between education and better life for women in Nigeria?
   b. What has education helped you to do that ordinarily you would not have been able to do within Nigeria social context as a woman?
   c. Does your education contribute to your living standard?
   d. Do you think your access to education provided you better life opportunities than women who did not go to school?
   e. What other comments would you like to provide about what women can do to better their lives?
   f. What do you consider the greatest benefit of having access to education?

IV. Barriers/challenges faced in school
   a. Explain your school experiences as a girl.
   b. Explore the treatment you received from your teachers and peers.
   c. Identify those instrumental to your progress in school.
   d. What presented the biggest challenge to your education?
e. Do you think Nigerian society supports women education? Why? Why not?
f. What is your view of early marriage: Does early marriage enhance or impede girls’ educational opportunity?
g. What is your perception of how your culture sees women and (i) how does that influence who you are, and (ii) what you can do as a Nigerian woman?
h. Does your role as a woman play any part in limiting your access to education?
i. Are there any external factors, for example traditional or cultural beliefs regarding women’s access and participation in education?

V. What role does your religion play in your education?
a. What is the place of women within your religion? Or explore how a woman is expected to behave within the context of your religion.
b. Did your religious upbringing or teaching promote or hinder your education?
c. Can you tell me how your religion regards men and women in terms of social status? Are both men and women regarded and treated equally?
Appendix C

Initial Email Letter to Heads of Departments for Female Professors
Initial Email Letter to Heads of Departments for Female Professors

Dear ________:

My name is Eugene Okoli. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. I am conducting a research for my dissertation in partial fulfillment of a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. The theme of my research is about women’s experience of access to education and equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. I am the investigator in this study (and can be reached at 989-506-2858 or eugeneokoli@wmich.edu or Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com). The supervising professor is Dr. Charles C. Warfield (and he can be reached at 269-387-3890 or via his email address Warfield@wmich.edu).

I am interested in finding out experiences of educated women regarding gender equity and equal educational opportunity toward access to education in Nigeria. I am also interested in understanding the familial, religious, and socio-cultural factors that influenced women’s access to education, the challenges and barriers they overcame in their educational process, and what impact that gaining access to education has had on them.

The purpose of this script is to seek your assistance in recruiting the female professors from the departments of education, sociology, and psychology to participate in this study. I would please request that you read my script in the faculty meeting, as well as make available a copy of this letter to all female professors from the above-mentioned departments. I would specifically request that any interested, potential participant respond to this letter by contacting the researcher directly via any of the contact information provided above that is convenient to them. After contact has been initiated between the researcher and any interested participant, the details of consent and confidentiality which are very important in this study will be fully and clearly communicated.

Please, communicate to the female professors that they are under no obligation to participate in this study. But if they indicate their interest in learning more about this study, let them please feel free to contact me through any of the contact information listed above.

I am hoping you will help me with this portion of the recruitment process.

Thank you.

Eugene Okoli
Appendix D

Script for Heads of Departments for Female Professors

108
Script for Heads of Departments for Female Professors

Hello_______,

My name is Eugene Okoli, a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. I am conducting a research on “Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education: Women’s Experience of Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunity.” I am interested in conducting interview with four female professors in the departments of social sciences, specifically sociology, education, and psychology. If you would be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to contact me directly via my email at Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com. I can also be reached by phone: 989-506-2858.

Details of the study will be fully explained to you as soon as you indicate your interest to participate in this study.

Thank you for your time.

Eugene Okoli
Appendix E

Initial Email Letter to Heads of Departments for Women Chairpersons
Dear ______:

My name is Eugene Okoli. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. I am conducting a research for my dissertation in partial fulfillment of a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. The theme of my research is about women’s experience of access to education and equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. I am the investigator in this study (and can be reached at 989-506-2858 or eugeneokoli@wmich.edu or Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com). The supervising professor is Dr. Charles C. Warfield (and he can be reached at 269-387-3890 or via his email address Warfield@wmich.edu).

I am interested in finding out experiences of women educated only in the indigenous way regarding their lack of access to formal education. I am also interested in understanding the familial, religious, and socio-cultural factors that influenced their lack of access to education, and the potential opportunity that having access to formal education would have provided them.

The purpose of this script is to seek your assistance in recruiting the non-literate women as indicated in the letter of permission from your university.

I would please request that you make available a copy of this letter to the village chairpersons so that their respective secretaries would read them at their bi-weekly meetings. Please, communicate to the chairpersons that no woman is under any obligation to participate in this study. But if anyone would indicate her interest in learning more about this study, let them or their representatives, please feel free to contact me through any of the contact information listed above. Alternatively, they could leave their names and/or contact information with your office for me. I will gladly pick them up in order to personally contact them.

After contact has been initiated between the researcher and any interested participant, the details of consent and confidentiality which are very important in this study will be fully and clearly communicated.

I am hoping you will help me with this portion of the recruitment process.

Thank you.

Eugene Okoli
Appendix F

Initial Email Letter to Potential Participants
Initial Email Letter to Potential Participants

Dear [Name],

My name is Eugene Okoli. I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. I am conducting a research for my dissertation in partial fulfillment of a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership. I am the investigator in this study (and can be reached at 989-506-2858 or eugeneokoli@wmich.edu or Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com). The supervising professor is Dr. Charles C. Warfield (and he can be reached at 269-387-3890 or Warfield@wmich.edu). You are being invited to participate in this study which is about women's experience of access to education and equal educational opportunity in Nigeria. The head of your department gave me your name, and I am hoping you will help me with my research.

I am interested in finding out experiences of educated women regarding gender equity and equal educational opportunity toward access to education in Nigeria. I am also interested in understanding the familial, religious, and socio-cultural factors that influenced your access to education, the challenges and barriers you overcame in your educational process, and what impact that gaining access to education has had on you.

Although there may not be any direct benefits to you for participating in this research, your input would assist the policy makers in better incorporating the needs of women in the educational curricula, plans and policies in order to provide education that is more inclusive.

I plan to conduct an interview with you, which will last for about 90 minutes. Details of the interview will be strictly confidential as fictitious names will be used and your position and employment will be described generically.

Please, know that you are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you decide you are interested in learning more about this study, please feel free to respond to this email. I will be contacting you via phone to discuss your possible participation in this study in the next couple of weeks. I will send you a consent form for your review. I will also send you interview guide in advance so you can be fully prepared for the interview questions. Appointment for the interview will be scheduled, and I will review the form with you. After I obtain your signature, the interview will begin.

If you have any questions, you may contact either me or Dr. Warfield via the contact information provided above. Thank you for considering to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Eugene Okoli
Appendix G

Script for Interview Follow-Up Contact to Participants
Script for Interview Follow-Up Contact to Participants

Hello__________.

I want to thank you for choosing to participate in the study of “Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education: Women’s Experience of Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunity.” Your participation is very much appreciated.

To summarize the information, comments and responses gathered during the interview, I have a few follow-up questions for clarification purposes. As previously indicated in the consent document, which you signed or verbally granted your consent to signify your willingness to participate in the study, please note that you may still withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this follow-up session, let me know the time frame that is convenient for you to enable me contact you.

Thank you again for your time. As soon as the summary of your interview is completed, I will send it to you for review to ensure that it represents your responses during the interview. Please feel free to contact me any time to ask questions, clarify issues, or for any concern regarding the study. I can be reached at 989-506-2858 or via email at Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com or eugeneokoli@wmich.edu. You may also contact Dr. Charles Warfield at 269-387-3890 or via email at Warfield@wmich.edu.
Consent Document

Western Michigan University
Department of: Teaching, Learning & Leadership
Principal Investigator: Dr. Charles C. Warfield
Student Investigator: Eugene Okoli

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled Women's Experience of Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education and Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunities. The study is being conducted by Eugene Okoli, a doctoral student in Educational leadership doctoral program at Western Michigan University, under the supervision of Dr. Charles C. Warfield, his dissertation chair.

The purpose of the research is to understand the experiences of select Nigerian women regarding gender equity specifically as it relates to access to formal education, as well as attempt to assess the barriers that hinder equal educational opportunity.

You will be asked to attend an interview session, which will last for about 90 minutes at a venue of your choice. However, for reasons of distance and/or time constraints, telephone interviews will only be conducted solely at the request of the participant. Telephone interview format will serve as an available alternative to participants in case of inability on their part to attend an already scheduled face-to-face interview.

The interview will entail understanding your viewpoints about gender equity in Nigerian education, the role of culture, family, religion, and other barriers that either helped you to have access to educational goals or impeded your educational goals. Your responses will be audio taped. Audio recording will be utilized to ensure the accuracy of the information. Transcripts of all recorded interviews will be produced. However, you may request the interviewer to turn off the audio recorder at any time during the interview. Details of the interview will be strictly kept confidential as fictitious names will be used and your position/status and employment will be described generically. By signing this document, you allow the audio taping of the interview.

Although there may not be any direct benefits to you for participating in this research, your input would assist the policy makers in better meeting the needs of women in the educational curricula, planning and policies in order to make education more inclusive for both men and women.

Sensitive pieces of information are most likely to come up in interview sessions involving family support, overcoming barriers, school environments, or lack of support. Since participants will be elicited to recall their experiences as women in school, there is a tendency to relive a trauma. Arrangements will be made with referral agencies to take care of the situation if such arises. Furthermore, since the findings of the study will be disseminated through the process of public dissertation, this posits another potential risk.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Family members might have access to the dissertation and read sensitive information and associate that with any of the participants. To avert this, the identity of participants will be masked to provide confidentiality.

The following information is being provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without any repercussions. If you do choose to participate in the study, you may refrain from addressing any particular question you do not wish to answer. If you have any questions and concerns about this study, you may contact either Eugene Okoli at 989-506-2858, or via email Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com, or Dr. Charles Warfield at 269-387-3890 or via email at Warfield@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (269-387-8293) or the Vice President for Research (269-387-8298) if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

Your signature below indicated that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

While in Nigeria conducting interviews, I can be contacted through my email Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com or via cellular number 0806-950-8626.

_________________________    _______________________
Signature                     Date

Consent obtained by: ___________________________    ____________
Initials of Researcher         Date
Appendix I

Script for Nonliterate Participants Regarding Waiver of Signed Consent
Script for Nonliterate Participants Regarding Waiver of Signed Consent

At the conclusion of the initial recruitment exercise, potential participants interested in the study would have been contacted, and the interview dates scheduled. Before the interview session begins, I will read, and explain in full the purpose and requirements of the study as well as ascertain whether they are still interested to participate in the study.

I will also ensure that the participants have understood that they may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without any repercussions. Furthermore, I will make it clear that should they choose to participate in the study, they may refrain from addressing any particular question they do not wish to answer.

Finally, I will communicate to them that their decision to participate in the interview indicates they have given their consent as no other written or signed document is required except the verbal consent.
Appendix J

Consent Form and Waiver of Signed Consent Request for Nonliterate Participants
Consent Form and Waiver of Signed Consent Request for Nonliterate Participants

Western Michigan University
Department of: Teaching, Learning & Leadership
Principal Investigator: Dr. Charles C. Warfield
Student Investigator: Eugene Okoli

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled Women's Experiences of Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education and Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunities. The study is being conducted by Eugene Okoli, as a condition for the completion of his studies.

The purpose of the research is to understand the experience of select Nigerian women experiences regarding access to formal education. The study will also attempt to assess the barriers that hinder equal educational opportunity.

You will be asked to attend an interview session, which will last for about 90 minutes at a venue of your choice. However, for reasons of distance and/or time constraints, telephone interviews will only be conducted solely at the request of the participant. Telephone interview format will serve as an available alternative to participants in case of inability on their part to attend an already scheduled face-to-face interview.

The interview will entail understanding your viewpoints about gender equity in Nigerian education, the role of culture, family, religion, and other barriers that contributed to your lack of access to formal education. Your responses will be audio-recorded to ensure their accuracy. Transcripts of all recorded interviews will be produced. However, you may request the interviewer to turn off the audio recorder at any time during the interview. Details of the interview will be strictly kept confidential as fictitious names will be used and your position/status and employment will be described generically. By agreeing to the terms of this document, you choose to participate in the study.

The following information is being provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without any problems.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

For the purposes of obtaining verbal consent from the non-literate subjects, I do request for a waiver of signed consent as it would be appropriate for participants in this category. Furthermore, the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to
subjects, and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

Meanwhile, while conducting interviews in Nigeria, I can reached through my email Eugene_okoli@yahoo.com or via cellular number 0806-950-8626.
Appendix K

Approval Letter From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
Date: June 28, 2006

To: Charles Warfield, Principal Investigator
   Eugene Okoli, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 06-06-10

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education: Women’s Experience of Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunity" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: June 28, 2007
Appendix L

Demographics of Participants
### Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics of Participants</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage (of whole population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-literate Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-90</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonliterate Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonliterate Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>79.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demographic Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Hausa/Fulani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Literate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


129

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.


Davis, L. E. (2006, January). Young girls in disadvantaged countries grow up too quickly: By focusing on everything, the Nike Foundation is trying to change that. *Delta Sky*.


Johnson, J. (1873, January 1). *The Negro*.


