

# Islamic Perspective of Gender Equity of Educational Opportunities

Adigun Wasilat Fayokemi<sup>1</sup>, Balogun Yisa Olorunda<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Arts and Cultural Studies (Islamic Studies Unit), School of Multi-Disciplinary Studies, College of Education Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Arts and Cultural Studies (Islamic Studies Unit), School of Multi-Disciplinary Studies, College of Education Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria

Correspondence: [adigun.wasilat@bouesti.edu.ng](mailto:adigun.wasilat@bouesti.edu.ng)<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

In Nigerian contemporary society, many educators are of the wrong opinion that Islam frowns at gender equality in education and that the practice of Purdah makes it difficult for Muslim females to fully benefit from the educational system. This paper examines the problems associated with gender inequality in Nigeria and now aims at promoting a heightened awareness of the fact that Islam enjoins gender equity in education for both females and males. The paper made reverence to the views of scholars on how gender inequality was viewed in the Western world. It focuses on three areas namely the concept of gender equity, constraints of gender equity and gender inequality in Islam with a view of recommending the provision of more educational opportunities for females from primary to tertiary levels of education. Thus, the study sets out to ascertain the perception of gender equity of educational opportunities by Islamic Scholars and Non- Muslim educators.

**Keywords:** Islam, Gender Equity, Gender Equality, Education, Perspective.

## Introduction

In Islam a female being is equal to a male being in the pursuit of education and knowledge and maintains a perfect equality between both sexes. It is out of ignorance that some people claim that Islam is an enemy of woman for it degrades her and lowers her status holding her intellectually deficient. Some of the notions of some scholars about this issue could be expressed in the words of Amadu and Adetanwa, O. (1998) that "Islam, like Christianity, frowns at gender equality. The practice of purdah in Islam makes it difficult for married Muslim women to fully benefit from the educational system". According to Akinkugbe (1994) parents and traditional rulers regarded western education as a threat to Muslim values. A study by Beckett and O'Connell (1976), Nayana (1985), Robertson (1985), Kourouma (1991) and Okojie (1995) revealed that religious practices impede the education of females as Muslim girls in Northern Nigeria were less likely to be enrolled in schools. Ummulkhayr (1992) noted that Islam has often been criticized by some ignorant reserves and commentators of curtailing the movement and activities of women through the 'Purdah' system locally referred to Nigeria as 'Kule' or 'Eha'. She lamented that this is a system whereby women are confined within the four walls of their houses to be denied right education which contradict the tenets of Islam that cater for the needs of all people at the irrespective of their gender.

Almost 14th centuries ago, Prophet Muhammed declared that "the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female". But upon this clear declaration of Prophet Muhammed, some people find it difficult to implement it and that is why women in Nigeria have long been among the victims of the general ignorance of Islam and broad general education among population. Before, it was considered

unnecessary and wrong to educate females in any system, Islamic or Western since they were destined for domestic duties which they believe it does not require education. Thus the mothers of the younger generation could play no role in supervising their children's education on the contrary they remained repositories of ignorance and superstition FOMWAN (2004).

The philosophy of Nigerian education takes into consideration every individuals during its formation when it stated that "Nigeria's philosophy of education is based on integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system" (FRN 1981). This is the more reason why it was included in the section 18 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) that "emphasis should be laid more on eradicating illiteracy and ensuring equal and adequate educational opportunities for the citizens (males and females) of the country (FGN: 200:1). This issues had been addressed by Islam over 1,400 years ago when Qur'an was revealed. It was Islam that at a period when the entire world was lost in ignorance and darkness stressed the importance of knowledge for mankind, not as a special privileged of a particular class but as an essential and unavoidable need for each and every being created. Islam makes it obligatory upon Muslims to acquire knowledge as a necessary condition for their being true believers of God and Islam. It also goes to the credit of Islam that it was the first religion that acknowledging a separate and independent human status of woman impressed upon her that she could not achieve perfection without knowledge. The Holy Qur'an enjoins the Muslims to seek knowledge and enjoins them to pray thus 'O my Lord advance me in knowledge' (Qur'an 20:114). The Qur'an also asserts that: Those who have no knowledge are not equal with those who have it (Qur'an 39:9), the meaning of revelation becomes manifest to the one who have knowledge and understanding (Qur'an 6:98-99) and "whosoever has been given knowledge (either male of female) has indeed been given abundant good (Qur'an 2:269). All these words of Al-Qur'an had been in existence before today's world proclamation on education. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in his words said "Knowledge is the lost property of a Muslim (male and female). This means they continue to search for knowledge and education wherever it is available. He even crowned it that "The seeking of knowledge is from cradle to the graveyard" which means both male and female Muslims should continue to search for knowledge from the childhood to the end of old age when death comes. This is just to show how Islam accord respect for the education of males and females in Islam. This view was supported by N.C.C.E. (2003) when proclaims that "women are not to be given a "token" education but the type of education that is equal and comparable in all aspects to that given to men or even more similarly since education is regarded as an instrument for social mobilization, it is only through a well planned policy for both men and women that would enable them participate fully in the political, economic and social activities, of their various communities.

## **Literature Review**

### ***The Concept of Gender Equity***

Gender can be defined as the social and cultural relationship which could be termed as roles given to differentiate sexes. Kabeer (1990) sees gender as the process by which individuals who are born into biological categories of male and female become the social categories of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. According to Anthony Ali and Beatrice Okeke (2002) gender implies a system of roles and relationship between men and women that are determined not by biology but by the social, political and economic context, while equity could be desirable just and fair (Dawn Quits, 2000). Gender equity is the extent to which maleness or femaleness are being manipulated in terms of desire, justice and fair.

According to Akinpelu (1990), the cry for equality of educational opportunity is invariably a call for restoration of balance, which action may inevitably involve what has been variously described as "preferential treatment", "compensatory measures", "positive discrimination", "reverse discrimination", "positive action", and so on.

In relation to gender equity in education, Plato in his Republic as well as in the laws contents that women ought to share as far as possible in education and in other ways with men. He laments that when women do not get the same education as men "he state, instead of being a whole is reduced to a half" Akinkugbe (1994). The issue of gender equity in education must be tackled with the role played by both gender (male and female) as rightly said that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Joseph et al, (1999).

### ***Gender Inequality as Viewed in the Western World***

The existence of gender inequality is brazenly unequivocal in Nigeria. The UNDP Human Development Report (1992) shows that the gender disparities in education have narrowed in industrial countries, in developing countries the female-male disparities remain wide.

In Nigeria the total figures for males and females at 44,544,5311 and 43,969,970 respectively, the disparity in education is indefensible Akinkugbe (1994). The issues of inequality is not peculiar to Nigeria in most countries of the world, there are lots of gender disparity in education. Pleck (2001) stated that "Nowhere in the world have woman achieved equality with men. Everywhere women suffer from discrimination as women.... The women in undeveloped countries however share the poverty of their nations. At the sametime they enjoy fewer priviledges and options than do men and underrepresented in national life... still, even in wealthy countries women do not share equally in national life".

Martha in her work "Gender Equity in Education" stated that the schools in American have not achieved gender equity in education. She lamented that the lack of gender equity has created some barriers to females and their continuing interest in science, mathematics and technology both in school and in choosing careers. In her research work, she noted four (4) reasons while their options are narrowed that: female tend to like science, mathematics and computers until adolescence when their interest begin to diminish. Females do not take higher science, mathematics and computer science classes as often as male, females do not go into science, mathematics and technology careers as often as boys, females, self-esteem decreases during adolescence more than males. Marta noted that despite genuine efforts by parents and teachers to create a better environment for females in the educational system, barriers to learning persist and gender inequality continues to flourish.

Still in U.S.A. Mary Thom (2001) realized the fact that gender equity issues are virtually ignored in most Colleges which educate their teachers and strategies to correct gender-biased classroom behaviour are almost non-existent. Therefore, most efforts to remedy gender inequality have been directed at working teachers. Jo Sander, (Director of the Teacher Education Equity Project (TEEP) from 1993 to 1996) tried to rectify some of these problems when he said "when you step to think about it by limiting report analyses the extent to which women and girls have progressed in science, engineering and technology over the last two decades. It reviews programs that successfully increase STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) participation of girls, women and minorities and "finds that women and girls excel in environments that encourage hands-on research, include mentoring and role models and link science, technology and engineering to other disciplines and real world applications". The report discusses the need for cultural and institutional change and provides resources to "help educators, business leaders and policy makers promote women's and girls' advancement in the science education". Mary Thom (2001).

In Nigeria, Ugwu (1999) observed that the causes of gender inequality in problem solving skills was as a result of sex-role identification. For instance, in co-educational schools, separate registers are kept for boys and girls and that they were given different functions to perform.

In European countries before female were being looked upon as a mere nonentity. This formed the theme of many a discourse of the learned scholars and "philosophers". This position of woman in Europe remained unaltered during the periods of serfdom and feudalism. They in their ignorance were blandished sometimes by luxury and license and at times was content to live as animals. Until the

industrial revolution took place in Europe when women proceeded to ask for the right to become a member of the parliament. As she had received an education similar to that imparted to man for both were required to do similar jobs now as a logical sequence to it she demanded an equal share in government along with men (Muhammed Qut B. (1973).

In Australia, gender equity was strongly against females. According to LYN YATES, graduate in the School of Education La Trobe University, Australia, in a conference held on Gender and Education-into 21st century held in mid-1995 in Sweden, speakers from around the world commend on the rise and new dominance of the 'what about the boy's issue in public and policy discussions on gender and education. He asserts that in Australia, policies on gender equity are being hastily rewritten to give more prominence to the needs of males. Two phenomena are most widely discussed in relation to the emergence of the boys' issue: evidence of change in achievement patterns for males and females, and discussions of social blackish against feminism and feminist reforms' LYN YATES (1997).

### ***Constraints of Gender Equity***

There are lots of constraints attributed to gender equity. The National Planning Commission (1992) identified the gender disparity in illiteracy rates as due mainly to low female enrolment, high female attrition and in the non-formal sector, lack of access to education. According to John W. Berry et al (1999) "stereotype of males and females are very different from one another in the Western Societies".

According to Joseph et al (1999) discrimination in female access to education persists in nearly all parts of Nigeria owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials. In the opinion of Fennemal (1979) "stereotype of males and females are very different from one another in the Western Societies".

According to Joseph et al (1999) discrimination in female access to education persists in nearly all parts of Nigeria owing to customary attitudes, early marriages and pregnancies, inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials. In the opinion of Fennemal (1979) teachers treat female and male students differently. They interact with male students more than females in both blame and praise contacts. In U.S.A. the problems identified by Marta have the same face with Nigeria when she declared that numerous studies show that teachers often treat males and females differently. According to her, male students receive more of the teacher's attention and are given more time to talk in class from pre-school through College. In Nigeria absence of equal educational experiences, skills and qualifications for women has relegated them to inferior lives as citizens (N.C.C.E. 2003).

### ***Gender Equity in Islam***

The status of woman in Islam constitutes no problem. Acquisition of knowledge was a great duty of women as of man for Islam wants the women folk to develop their national faculties along with their physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence. This could be seen in the words of Prophet Muhammed when he said "The seeking of knowledge is an obligatory on every Muslim male and female". It is very clear that this hadith constitutes no barrier to education irrespective of sex, age and scope.

Education in Islam is the accumulation of knowledge through which piety is attained and knowledge in Islam is not limited to the study and memorization of religious texts, rather Islam gives impetus to seeking all forms of useful knowledge. Ummul Khayr (1992). The prophet's attitude towards female children and female education is a good example of what is found in the Qur'an. In one of his hadith he said "If you educate a male, you are educating an individual but if you educate a female, you are educating a whole nation." This word of the Prophet describes the importance of females' education.

Prophet Muhammed lays special emphasis on the education of daughters. He also said in one of his hadith thus: "whoever brings up two sisters or two daughters, and gives them a broad education, and treat them well, and gives them in marriage, for him is paradise" (Abu Dau' & Tirmidhi). According to Aisha

(1987), the Prophet's concern for the education of girls was reflected in his teaching of Aisha, who was still a young girl when he married her and was only 18 when he died. She had a natural ability for learning and a strong sense of reasoning, he taught her as much as she was ready to learn. He was so impressed and pleased with her learning that he even told people thus. "You can learn half of your religion from this rosy-cheeked girl". He encouraged people to consult her on religious matter, and after his death she became one of the major sources of Hadith (Islamic Jurisprudence).

With all these injunctions some people still resist their daughters from having access to education. Their action is not only misguided but a contrary to the word of God and the sayings of Prophet Muhammed. A good parent is expected to be deeply committed to and involved in the education of all his children (the daughters as much as the sons). The Prophet's respect for a wife's intelligence and understanding was also reflected in his readiness to consult his wives and to respond to their good advice. An instance of this practice is recorded on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. Many of the Muslims were reluctant to accept the treaty. The Prophet seeked advice from his wife Umm Salamah and her advice worked advantageously in favour of the prophet, Muslims and indeed Islam.

### ***Gender Equity as Viewed Today***

According to Fatmir and Bukuri (2015), the unending quest for gender equality has occupied conferences, seminars, talks, researches, books and journals, for the past years and decades. Therefore, it will be very absurd for anybody making people believe that there is no gender equity in Islam in terms of education.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has dealt elaborately on gender equity of education in Islam, it compared the views of some scholars in the western world and arrived at the fact that gender equity of educational opportunities should be addressed so that the stated educational objectives could be achieved. The paper also recommends that: There should be no discrimination of gender in the study of any course for this will cause violation of the laws of God and the philosophy of Nigeria education; attention should be given to women's education so that they would have the opportunities to exhibit their God given traits in their working places. There must be an awareness of all citizens to the fact that equal educational opportunities exist irrespective of gender, age, locality or status.

### **Acknowledgments**

None

### **Conflict of Interest**

Authors have no conflict of interest.

### **Funding Source**

The authors received no funding to conduct this study.

### **References**

- Akinkugbe, O.O. (1994). *Nigeria and Education. The Challenges Ahead*. Ibadan Spectrum Books Limited.
- Akinpelu, J.A. (1990). *LASU SEMINAR Series at Lagos State University*, Ojo Lagos University Press.
- Amadu, S. and Adetanwa, O. (1998). *Nigerian Women in Society and Development*. Ibadan Dokun Publishing House.

- Anthony, A. and Beatrice, A. (2002). *Philosophy and Education*. Onitsha Africana Fep Publishers.
- Beckett, P. and Connell, J. (1976). Education and the situation of women; Background and Attitudes of Christian and Muslim female students at a Nigerian University. *Cultures et Development*, 8(1) 243-265.
- Dawn, O. (2000). *Primary Teaching Methods*, London, Macmillan Education Ltd.
- Fatmir Shehu and Bukuri Zejno (2015). Gender Equality and the participation of Muslim Women in Education and Work: A Critical Analysis. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication>. Retrieved 25th June, 2022.
- Fennemal, E.A. (1979). *Women and Girls in Mathematics Equality*. Mathematics Women's Association in Nigeria.
- FRN (1981). *National Policy on Education*. NERC Press
- FRN (1989). *National Policy on Education*. NERC Press
- Hammudah, A. (7th Ed.) *Islam in focus*. Kuwait International Islamic Federation of Student Organization.
- John, W.B. (1999) *Cross-Cultural Psychology: Research and Application*. USA. Cambridge University Press.
- Joseph, O. et al (1999): Evaluation in Africa. Ibadan Stirling-Horden Publisher (Nig) Ltd.
- Kabber, N. (1990): Understanding gender: In INSTRAW (1990). Gender Concepts in Development Planning: Basic Approach Italy INSTRAWA.
- Klan, M.M. (1971: Sahih al-Bukhari Boards Mills (Conversion) Ltd.
- Lenu, B.A. (1987): The Ideal Muslim Husband Minna. Islamic Education Trust
- LYN, Y. (1997): British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol. 18, No.3 Australia, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. Pp. 337-347.
- Mahmud, Y.Z. (1980): The meaning of the Holy Qur'an Lebanon. Der al-choura Publications.
- Marta, C.P. (1999): Gender Equity in Education. U.S.A. Drexel University Press.
- Mary, T. (2001). National Council of Research on Women, Balancing the Equation: Where are Women and Girls in Science, Engineering and Technology.
- Muhammad O. (1973): Islam the misunderstood religion. Dacca Pakistan Press Syndicate.
- N.C.C.E. (2003). Dealing with Diversity-Gender issues in Nigeria Colleges of Education Abuja National Commission for Colleges of Education.
- N.P.C. (1992): National Programme of Action for the survival protection and development of Nigeria child. Lagos Federal Government of Nigeria.
- Okojie, C. (1995): Gender Gap in Access to Education in Nigeria FEMED No.6, October, 1996.
- Pleck, E.H. (2001). Contemporary Status of Women in M. Cumming (Ed.) Ibid (Vol. 29, P.11).
- Robertson, C. (1985): A growing dilemma: Women and change in Africa Primary Education, 1950-1980: In Gideon Were (ed) Women and Development in Africa Nairobi Gideon's Were Press.
- Safdar, G., Javed, M.N., Amin, S. (2020). Use of Internet for Educational Learning among Female University Students of Punjab, Pakistan. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(8), 3371-3380. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2020.080809

- Safdar, G., Khan, A.W. (2020). E-Learning: Current Scenario of Internet and Educational Learning among University Students of Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research*, 23(1), 171-185.
- Safdar, G., Rauf, A., Ullah, R., Rehman, A.U. (2020). Exploring Factors Leading to Quality Online Learning in the Era of Covid-19: A Correlation Model Study. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(12A), 7324-7329. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2020.082515
- Shabir, G., Safdar, G. (2014). Human Rights and Women's Rights in Islam. *Ulum-e-Islamia*, 19(1), 114-126.
- Shabir, G., Safdar, G., Shah, S.R.A., Asim, M. (2014). Iranian Higher Educational System and its Socio-Political Impacts in 21st Century. *Journals of Educational Research*, 17(2), 107-116.
- Ugwa, P.N. (1999): Women and Mathematics Education in the next millennium, Auska Educational Research and Publishers.
- Ummulkhayr, A. (1992): The dignity of womanhood in Islam. Ibadan Iksan Publication.