

Gender Differentials in Educational Attainment in Rural Nigeria

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Abstract

Education, identified as the substratum of any serious nation's growth and development, is regarded as an instrument for social change, as well as the process of preparing an individual to become a functional and acceptable member of society. It also ensures the character and moral development of the young learners and the development of sound attitudes for both genders. This study examined gender differentials in educational attainment in rural Nigeria, employing the t-test, analysis of variance and the ordinary least squares regression model for analysis. The main factor which had negative effects on educational attainment of female-headed households was the cost of schooling while factors such as the organization running the school and means of transportation had positive effects on the educational attainment of female households. On the other hand, while age and occupation of the household head had negative effects on male educational attainment, factors such as the value of asset, the organization running the school and means of transportation had positive effects. The approval and implementation of necessary legislation and policies on education targeted

at rural dwellers is of utmost importance. This could center on the provision of more nearby government-owned schools as well as awareness creation on the essence of educating both genders, especially the girl child, with a focus of achieving gender balance in educational attainment.

Keywords: gender, differentials, education, attainment, rural, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Achievement of equal status in educational attainment by men and women is one of the basic needs of the society and is a widely recognized veritable tool for addressing issues of poverty, underdevelopment, population, illiteracy, ignorance, health problems, conflicts as well as sustainability. Education ensures the character and moral development of the young learners and the development of sound attitudes and is a vital tool for addressing virtually all global problems. Thus, ensuring equal access to education by both genders is a global goal (Haruna and Lima, 2015). However, it is still apparent that global gender equality in education is yet to be attained as 129 million girls are out of school (UNICEF, 2020).

Education, identified as the bedrock of any serious nation's growth and development in rural areas (Isa et al., 2019) is regarded as an instrument for national development and social change as well as the process of preparing an individual to become a functional and acceptable member of the society.

Africa remains the region with the highest number of out of school girls in education with 59 million children being victims in 2018, out of which 55% were girls (UNESCO, 2019). Specifically in sub-Saharan Africa, gender differentials in education are characterized by not only the socio-cultural factors among rural households but also cultural bias, religion, oppression, (a large factor in the subordination and status of women) and discrimination against women among different regions of the country (embedded in all dimensions of culture) (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2011). Nigeria is one of the most affected countries in sub-Sahara Africa and is ranked 146 out of 156 countries in the gender equality index according to Global Gender Gap Report, 2021.

Gender differentials in education have been on the increase in most rural areas. For instance, over 56% of the girls make up 77 million children not in school, while women make up two-thirds of the illiterate adults (Aja-Okorie, 2013). Also, according to UNICEF (2020) 32 million girls of primary school age, 30 million girls of lower-secondary school age and 67 million girls of upper-secondary school age are out of school. The developmental problems such as poor basic health facilities, good road networks, portable drinking water, high illiteracy level and prevalence of extreme poverty among others are believed to be the challenges affecting the process of educating Nigerian children in rural areas (Haruna and Lima, 2015). In addition, the almost 30 years of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) have achieved little in terms of gender equality.

Section 18 of the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution, which deals with the basic principles of governmental policy, reflects the country's dedication to equality across board,

regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation; while the National Policy on Education (2004) declares that every Nigerian child is entitled to equal educational opportunity. However, the government appears not to be taking giant steps to guaranteeing that females have adequate access to basic education enrollment, retention, and completion. Most Nigerian women have been deprived of the opportunity to participate fully in national progress as a result of this. It is of interest to know that girls' education will not only help the country to progress economically, politically, and technologically, it will also greatly help liberate women from natural dependence, low self-esteem, superstition and other constraints that hinder the country's development (Akinbi and Akinbi, 2015).

Further, the achievement of equal status in educational attainment by men and women in Nigeria has continued to be elusive since the introduction of western education which is due to many factors ranging from the malfunctioning educational system to cultural and traditional practices that are inimical to women's education (Akubuilu and Omeje, 2012). In fact, despite several investment programmes implemented between 1986 and 2004 to bridge the gender gap in schooling among children and increase enrolment in schools, most children are still found outside the walls of the classroom especially in rural areas (Babatunde et al., 2018). In other words, policy interventions aimed at reducing gender differentials in educational attainment have proved futile. Thus, owing to the link between gender and education, a decrease in gender disparity in education has become a major developmental challenge among policy makers and major stakeholders. However, discussions on education tends to focus on a privileged area such as the urban areas while the stakeholders in the rural areas are confronted with issues of the structure, job satisfaction, the foundation, and lack of maximum cooperation from student and their parents (Isa et al., 2019), consequently neglecting the potential roles of equal access by both gender to education most especially in rural areas.

Most conversations often fail to realize that to attain equal access of both gender in education, women and men should enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation, decision-making and equally valued and favoured needs of both. Therefore, due to the socio-cultural factors that affect women and the gender inequality that marginalizes women, the high incidence of sub-standard education and the impact of gender differences experienced in the past few decades have become a key developmental issue (Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2011). Thus, since about half of Nigerians are living in rural areas (World Bank, 2018), an examination of the factors associated with gender differentials in the educational attainment of rural households in Nigeria which is the objective of this study is pertinent if the progress is to be made towards achieving the fifth Sustainable Development Goal of achieving gender equality and empowering girls and women. The analytical tools used for this study were t-test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression model.

2. Literature Review

Few researchers have focused on gender differentials of rural dwellers in attaining education but a few related studies are discussed as follows:

Ferdinand and Enweani (2019) in their study on the socioeconomic effects of gender inequality in education, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and employment showed that inequality is exclusively established on the institution of patriarchy, women are not well represented in job positions and girls often face school drop-out syndrome. The study suggested that policymakers in education, ICT industry and employment agencies promote equality in their organisations, and activate constitutional provisions against gender inequality in various parts of Nigeria.

George et al. (2018) also examined women and access to education in Nigeria. The study identified the history, meaning, forms and purpose of women's education. They critically examined relevant archival resources, data and theories, the militating factors including cultural, economic and religious barriers affecting women's access to education and the changes in contemporary societies. The study concluded that the education of women is a major avenue for harnessing the requisite human potential for the optimal development of the Nigerian state.

Nakpodia and Urien (2017) briefly researched gender discrimination in the Nigerian school system because women have often been discriminated against. The study pointed out that training opportunities have been considerably less open to women than men in Nigeria. The study concluded that if this problem of discrimination is eradicated, it would help women appreciate their values so that they would not be discriminated against in their day-to-day life, and illiteracy too would be eradicated.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there is paucity of information on the link between gender differentials in educational attainment in rural Nigeria. This study therefore adds to the existing literature by investigating the factors affecting male and female educational attainment in rural Nigeria. More so, achieving gender equality and empowerment of girls and women is a core Sustainable Development Goal (SDG).

3. Method

The study was conducted in rural Nigeria which represents 49.7% of the country's population. Nigeria is located in the western part of Africa in the Gulf of Guinea and is situated between Longitudes 2°2' and 14°30' East and between Latitudes 4° and 14° North. Nigeria is blessed with a landmass spanning over an area of 92.4million hectares (924,000 km²) and surrounded by the Republic of the Niger to the North, Benin Republic to the West, the Republic of Chad to the North-East and Cameroon to the East (Azih, 2008). The climate of the country generally falls within the humid tropics and the country is located close to the equator. High humidity is experienced from February to November in the South and from June to September in the North. Low humidity coincides with the dry season. Annual rainfall decreases Northward; rainfall ranges from about 2000 millimeters in the coastal zone to 500-700 millimeters in the North (Library of Congress, 2008). The presence of multiple vegetation zones, abundant rain, surface water and underground water resources and moderate climatic extremes allow for the production of diverse food and cash crops by over 60% of the population making the agricultural sector the highest employer of the country's total labour force, providing livelihood for about 90% of the rural population (IFAD, 2012).

Secondary data used in this study is the first wave of the General Household Survey (GHS) data collected by the National Bureau of Statistics in conjunction with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMA&RD), the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and the World Bank (WB). The first wave of the GHS data was carried out in two visits to the panel households (post-planting visit in August-October 2010 and post-harvest visit in February-April 2011). Households were selected using the two-stage probability sampling procedure. In the first stage, Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) also known as Enumeration Areas (EAs) were chosen. These were selected based on probability proportionate to size (PPS) of the total EAs in each state and Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja and the total households listed in those EAs. A total of 500 EAs were selected using this method. The second stage involved the selection of households employing the systematic selection of ten (10) households per EA. In all, 500 clusters/EAs were canvassed and 5,000 households were interviewed (3,370 rural households and 1,630 urban households). However, only 1,243 rural households with complete and relevant data in wave 1 constituted the sample size for this study.

A *t*-test is any statistical hypothesis test in which the test statistic follows a *t*-distribution if the null hypothesis is supported. It can be used to determine if two sets of data are significantly different from each other, and is most commonly applied when the test statistic would follow a normal distribution if the value of a scaling term in the test statistic were known. The hypothesis of this study, therefore states that:

H₀: The socio-economic characteristics (age, household size and years of education) do not affect the gender differentials in educational attainment in rural Nigeria.

H₁: The socio-economic characteristics (age, household size and years of education) affect the gender differentials in educational attainment in rural Nigeria.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) measures regional differences in educational attainment by gender. ANOVA is inferential statistics used to analyse the differences among group means and their associated procedures (such as "variation" among and between groups). The general formula is as follows:

Table 1. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Sources of Variation	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F-ratio
Treatment	n-1	SST	$\frac{SST}{n-1}$	$\frac{MSST}{MSSE}$
Error	n(k-1)	SSE	$\frac{SSE}{n-1}$	
Total	Kn-1	SS		

where:

n = number of treatment

k = number of elements within each treatment

$$C = \text{correction factor} = \frac{T^2}{kn} \quad (1)$$

$$SS = \text{Total Sum of Square given as } \sum X_{ij}^2 - C \quad (2)$$

$$SST = \text{Sum of Square Treatment given as } \sum \frac{x_{ij}^2}{k} - C \quad (3)$$

$$SSE = \text{Sum of Square Error} = SS - SST \quad (4)$$

The factors influencing the educational attainment of the representative households were measured using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) model. The model is specified as equation 5.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots \dots \dots \beta_n X_n + E_i \quad (5)$$

Where:

Y is the dependent variable

$X_1 - X_n$ represents the vector of the explanatory variables.

$\beta_1 - \beta_n$ represents the parameter coefficients.

ε_i represents the independently distributed error terms.

Specifically, the independent variables used in the model are as follows;

X_1 = Age (in years);

X_2 = Marital Status (married=1, 0 if otherwise);

X_3 = Value of asset (in naira);

X_4 = Household size (number);

X_5 = Organization running the school (federal government =1, 0 if otherwise);

X_6 = Means of transportation to school (motorcycle =1, 0 if otherwise);

X_7 = Access to scholarship (Yes=1, 0 if otherwise);

X_8 = Cost of schooling (in naira);

X_9 = Occupation (agriculture=1, 0 if otherwise);

X_{10} = Location of household head (Southwest=1, 0 if otherwise);

ε_i = The normally distributed random error.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The average age of male and female respondents in the study area was 47.1 years and 57.1 years respectively, although 45.3% and 53.5% of the male and female respondents respectively had primary education. This may be because most rural residents do not consider secondary and higher education is essential to maintaining rural life.

Furthermore, more than four-fifths and less than four-fifths of the male and female interviewed were married, and the average family size was approximately 7 and 4 members per household for male and female respondents respectively. About 45.3% and 53.5% of male and female household heads respectively attended schools owned by the government while means of transportation was mainly the use of motorcycles with a greater proportion (81.2% and 79.8%) of the respondents not having the advantage of obtaining scholarship while schooling.

Table 2. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency		Percentage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age (in years)				
<20	5	0	0.4	0
21-40	427	16	38.3	12.4
41-60	515	61	46.2	47.3
61-80	156	44	14.0	34.1
>80	11	8	1.0	6.2
Mean	47.09	57.10		
SD	13.54	13.78		
Educational status				
No formal education	190	21	17.1	16.3
Primary	505	69	45.3	53.5
Secondary	293	31	26.3	24.0
Tertiary	126	8	11.3	6.2
Marital status				
Married	1048	10	94.1	91.5
Divorced	19	13	1.7	8.5
Widowed	19	106	1.7	82.2
Single	28	0	2.5	0.0
Total	1114	129		
Household size				
1-5	444	103	39.9	79.8
6-10	538	25	48.3	19.4
11-15	124	1	11.1	0.8
16-20	6	0	0.5	0
>20	2	0	0.2	0
Total	1114	129		
Mean	6.52	3.88		
SD	3.05	2.14		
Organization running the school				
Did not attend school	190	21	17.1	16.3
Federal Government	505	69	45.3	53.5
State government	293	31	26.3	24.0
Private organization	126	8	11.3	6.2
Means of transportation				
Did not attend school	190	21	17.1	16.3
Motorcycle	479	99	43.0	76.7
Private car	34	9	3.1	7.0
Bus	411	0	36.8	0
Scholarship				
Did not attend school	190	21	17.1	16.3
Yes	19	5	1.7	3.9
No	905	103	81.2	79.8

Source: Author data.

Table 3 showed the result of the test of significance of gender differentials in educational attainment. The socio-economic characteristics (age, household size, and years of education) affected the gender differentials in educational attainment in rural Nigeria as shown and the null hypothesis which states that the socio-economic characteristics do not affect the gender differentials in educational attainment was rejected. In other words, differences in educational attainment were attributed to factors such as age, household size and years of education.

Table 3. T-test for socio-economic characteristics differences between male and female educational attainment

Variables	MD	t-value
Age	10.02	7.94***
Household size	-2.64	-9.57***
Highest Educational Cert.	-3.30	-6.329***

Source: Author data.

Note: MD= Mean difference

According to Table 4, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test for regional mean differences in educational attainment in rural Nigeria was statistically significant. The mean difference between male and female was significant ($F(5,1864) = 22.32, p < 0.000$) indicating that educational attainment differs between males and females based on highest educational certificate obtained. In other words, H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted indicating that there is a significant difference in educational attainment across different geopolitical zones in rural Nigeria.

Table 4. Regional differences between male and female-headed households based on highest educational certificate

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2224.048	5	444.810	22.323	0.000
Within Groups	37141.653	1864	19.926		
Total	39365.701	1869			

Source: Author data.

This is consistent with the findings of Eshetu (2014) in which there was a significant difference between males and females. Specifically, the proportion of male students in the upper achieving groups was significantly higher than the females and the opposite was true for low achieving groups in the study.

The effect of different socioeconomic characteristics on gender differences in education in rural Nigeria is presented in Table 5. Significant factors affecting gender differentials of male respondents are age, the worth of an asset, organization running the school, means of transportation, scholarship and occupation. With respect to the age of the male household head, a negative coefficient of 0.101 indicated that older household heads had a lower level of educational attainment. This is consistent with earlier findings in this study in which most of the respondents had primary education.

Table 5. Factors influencing gender differentials in educational attainment

Variables	Male		Female	
	Coefficient	T-values	Coefficient	T-values
Age	-0.101	-3.240***	-0.039	-0.580
Marital status	0.007	0.110	0.043	0.490
Value of asset	0.017	2.290**	0.014	1.060
Household size	-0.008	-0.410	-0.030	-1.090
Org. running the school	0.967	20.260***	0.824	7.820 ***
Means of Transportation	2.700	81.600***	2.986	46.370***
Scholarship winning	0.167	1.660*	0.174	1.420
Cost of schooling	0.041	1.480	-0.400	-11.430***
Occupation	-0.098	-3.220*	-0.034	-0.710
Location (Southwest)	0.041	0.580	0.102	1.390
Constants	-0.033	-0.100	0.031	0.110
Number of observations	1114		129	
F(10, 1103)	832.28		286.10	
Prob>F	0.000		0.000	
R-squared	0.883		0.956	
Adjusted R-squared	0.882		0.952	
Root MSE	.295		.1781	

Source: Author data Note: ***, **, and * are respectively 1%, 5% and 10% Significant levels

The value of an asset for the male respondents had positive effects on educational attainment, implying that educational attainment increased with increased value of asset (an important aspect of the family which determines the level of income and the spending ability of the head of the household). This finding is related to the findings of Donkoh and Amikuzuno (2011) in which male-headed households on the average spend more on education than their female counterparts. For both male and female respondents, the nature of organization running the school also had positive effects indicating that respondents enrolled in schools run by the Federal government have a higher level of educational attainment. This is expected because such schools run by the Federal Government are highly subsidised or non-fee paying, serving as an incentive for attaining a higher level of education irrespective of gender. This suggests some advancement in terms of achieving balanced education for both gender, however, the educational imbalance between the male and female child is quite noticeable especially in the rural areas of Nigeria (Alagbu et al., 2013 and Chima, 2013).

In addition, the means of transportation to school had positive effects on educational attainment for both male and female respondents implying that having a means of transportation (motorcycle) to school increased the level of educational attainment. The coefficient of access to scholarship for male respondents as expected was positive and significant implying that having an access to scholarship, which is a means by which government, private institutions or major stakeholders take full or partial responsibility for the cost of schooling increased the level of educational attainment.

Also, male heads engaged in farming as their primary occupation had a lower level of educational attainment mainly because of the rigours of farming which will leave less time available for schooling as well as lack of importance attached to schooling in rural areas. Similarly, the higher the cost of schooling for female respondents, the lower the level of educational attainment. This finding is consistent with that of Mishra et al. (2017) in which women do not have equal access to resources and opportunities that can make them have enough equal rights with their male counterparts in the Philippines. In summary, the major factors affecting the gender differentials in educational attainment in the study area for male respondents were age, value of assets and occupation of the respondents and cost of schooling for female respondents. Key factors affecting educational attainment of both genders were organisation running the school and means of transportation to school.

5. Conclusion

The study revealed that gender differences in educational attainment in rural Nigeria stems from a of low level of education, high cost of schooling, being engaged in farming as a primary occupation, low level of assets and consequently, the inability to take up opportunities for a better standard of living, accessibility to school and type of funding available to the school among other problems. Therefore, efforts at closing the gender gap should focus more on the microeconomic objectives of the government and priority given to equal access to education to achieve rural development in the country. To achieve this goal, research on the effect of gender differences on educational attainment is highly relevant because it highlights the impact of gender education on the rural economy, society, and the country as a whole. It also explains if there are gender differentials and regional differences in educational attainment. This study has revealed that age, household size, and years of education are the key socio-economic factors affecting the gender differentials in educational attainment and that a significant difference in educational attainment across different geopolitical zones exists. However, while efforts must be made to address the key factors affecting gender differences in the education of rural residents, factors influencing the provision of enabling environment for as many organizations that are in charge of running formal education at all levels to give opportunity for equal access of education for both gender should not be ignored for effective rural economic growth and development. In addition, the promotion of basic education for all, the establishment of scholarship programmes that are specially targeted at rural households, the formulation and implementation of relevant laws against gender discrimination and the marginalization of rural women is germane to closing the gap in gender differences in educational attainment in rural Nigeria.

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