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## **Implications of Missionary Education for Women in Nigeria: A Historical Analysis**

By Okonkwo, Uche Uwaezuoke<sup>1</sup> and Ezeh, Mary-Noelle Ethel<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

Education is a key factor in human development and social transformation. The problematic of women development in Nigeria traces its roots in the type of education dispensed by missionary agencies and the British colonial administration. Christian Missionaries were the first to initiate the development of western education in Nigeria. Government participation first took the form of giving limited financial assistance to voluntary agencies and gradually developed into the recognition of education as the responsibility of the Government. The present study is a historical analysis of the evolution of the development of education in Nigeria in relation to the contemporary women question it seeks to establish the place of girls' education in the missionary and government overall plan for the education of Nigerian youth. The objective of the study is to demonstrate the significant economic, social and political implications of the government controlled education for women in Nigeria. If women still lag behind in these three key areas of human development, the history of education has had its own contributions to make. The primary source of the study is based on archival data in form of annual and periodic reports, programme of education for boys and girls, statistical information and relevant government publications.

*Keywords:* Missionary, education, Nigerian women

### **Introduction**

The first part of this study presents the historical development of western education in Nigeria through the initiative of the Christian missions, who were later joined by the British colonial administration. The work takes a critical look at the curriculum of studies proposed for boys and girls at the primary and secondary school levels and examines its implication for women development. It further studies the place of female instruction in the education reform of F.D. Lugard. It analyses critically the statistical representation of girls in the education report of 1928 and explores its implications for women development. The paper concludes by relating the contemporary weak economic, social and political situation of women in Nigeria to the overall low position of female instruction in the history of the development of education in Nigeria.

### **The early development of missionary and colonial education in Nigeria**

The development of education in Nigeria preceded the political unity of the nation. It was in 1842 that Rev. Thomas Freeman and the couple De Graft of the Wesleyan Methodist first arrived in Nigeria to establish a mission and a school. In 1878, the mission established its first boys' school at Lagos and a girls' school in the same town

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in 1895. The Church Missionary Society opened its first school at Abeokuta in 1846 and had four schools at Badagry, Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan by the end of 1949. In 1859, the mission started a grammar school at Lagos and opened its first Girl's school in Eastern Nigeria at Ogbunike in Onitsha district in 1895. In 1872, four French Catholic Sisters organized education for girls at Lagos, while the S.M.A. Priests established St. Gregory's Grammar school in the same town in 1876. The Holy Ghost Fathers began the first Catholic school at Onitsha on the East of the Niger in 1886. The Catholic mission also opened two convent schools at Abeokuta and Onitsha in 1886 and 1892 respectively. The United Free Church founded the famous Hope Waddell Training Institute at Calabar in 1895. The different Christian missions used school as an organ of religious instruction, character formation, skill acquisition and initiation into the three basic elements of reading, writing and arithmetic.

The first government financial contribution to education in Nigeria was recorded in 1877 when the Lagos administration made a grant of £200 to each of the three missionary societies working in the Colony and renewed it annually until 1882 (Lewis 1956:27). 1886 saw the birth of the first purely Nigerian education ordinance, which provided for a Board of Education consisting of the Governor, members of the Executive Council and four other nominated members. The ordinance also set up conditions for financial assistance to schools. This marked the beginning of the colonial government policy of grant-in-aid of education, a system by which the administration provided financial assistance to voluntary agencies and, in return, exercised some control. The grant was awarded for good organization, discipline, number of enrolment and academic performance.

In 1899, the colonial government established its first school in Lagos for the education of Moslem children (Phillipson 1948:12). With the creation of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1900, government opened a primary school in Benin City in 1901. The administration also started to exercise some control over the educational development in the Protectorate. In 1903, it created a Department of Education and issued an education proclamation, which laid down rules for instructions in primary, secondary and technical schools (Public Record Office 1903, CO588/1). The proclamation classified schools into three categories: government, assisted and unassisted school. Government schools were the educational institutions established and financed by the administration. Assisted and unassisted schools belong to the voluntary agencies, but while the former qualify for the government financial aid and control, the latter remained autonomous. By 1904, the colonial administration had established 6 primary schools: 3 for boys and 3 for girls. Four years later, the government schools counted 40:6 in the Western Province, 18 in the Central Province and 16 in the Eastern Province (Phillipson 1948:6).

### **1909 Curriculum and its implications for women's development**

In 1909, the colonial administration enacted a new code of education to cover the merged territories of Lagos Colony and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The code graded the educational institutions into infant, primary, secondary, technical, agricultural schools and training colleges for teachers. It created the office of "Director for public instructions" and demanded the appointment of liaison managers for accredited assisted

schools. Paragraph VII of 1909 education code listed the syllabus for the different levels. A close analysis of the proposed subjects for boys and girls is very revealing.

#### **Syllabus for primary schools 1909 (Code of Education, 1909)**

<b>Obligatory subjects for boys</b>	<b>Obligatory subjects for girls</b>
Colloquial English and Nature study	None
Reading with translation into vernacular, meaning of words and simple Grammar	Same as boys
Arithmetic	Same as boys
Hygiene and sanitation	Same as boys
Manual Training to include drawing or shorthand from standard III	Domestic Economy – Cookery or Bakery, Plain Needlework and Laundry.
Moral Instruction	Same as boys
<b>Optional subjects</b>	<b>Optional subjects</b>
History and Geography	None
Singing	Same as boys
Drill and physical exercise	Same as boys

#### **Syllabus for secondary schools 1909 (Code of Education, 1909)**

<b>Obligatory subjects for boys</b>	<b>Obligatory subjects for girls</b>
Colloquial English, Reading, Elementary Grammar, Literature	Same as boys
Writing to include Dictation and Composition	Same as boys
Arithmetic to include Measurement	Arithmetic
History	Same as boys
Geography	Same as boys
Drawing	Domestic Economy
Latin or French	None
Algebra	None
Geometry	None
<b>Optional subjects</b>	<b>Optional subjects</b>
Natural science	None
Already obligatory	Algebra/Geometry
Drill and physical exercise	Same as boys

A comparison of the proposed subjects for boys and girls unmasks the colonial government's attitude towards male and female education. At the primary level, compulsory subjects for boys consisted of colloquial English, elementary science, drawing and shorthand. In place of these scientific and job-oriented subjects, female education was tailored towards domestic science and home management. While boys were given the choice of studying the literary subjects of history and geography, girls were kept in complete ignorance. The disparity becomes even more glaring in secondary schools. At this level, boys added the study of algebra, geometry, French or Latin as compulsory subjects. They also continued the study of fine arts, shorthand, history and

geography. Girls, on the other hand, deepened their knowledge of domestic science. They undertook history and geography. They were, however, denied the study of the classic and modern languages of Latin and French.

From the economic perspective, young men leaving school were better equipped with job oriented subjects that enabled them to seek employment in the public and private sector. On finishing primary education, some of the young men gained the pen-pushing jobs as junior clerks, while others got employed in the government railway, public works and marine department. The employment opportunity offered men better footing in the nascent money economy and thus created a shift of balance for the womenfolk whose primary education offered very little chance in the job market. Socially, boys' early exposure to literary and scientific education contributed to the preponderance of the male population in the new emerging social elite, which provided the political leadership of the nationalism of the twentieth century.

Girls, on the hand, were kept at a disadvantage in the market economy as their education oriented them towards assuming unpaid domestic functions. They were ill equipped for job competition. Although the Nigerian women traditionally occupied a prominent position in the world of commerce, the colonial education policy made no provisions to introduce relevant related subjects in the curriculum for girls. The lacuna left the female population further ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the changing rules of commerce in a fast mutating society. Moreover the absence of natural science, menstruation and drawing the curriculum for girls reflects the late entry of women in certain high-ranking professions like medicine, pharmacy, engineering etc.

Missionary societies reinforced the domestication of female education through the establishment of training centers for girls, which aimed at preparing them for marriage. Girls admitted at the centers were often fiancées or wives of teachers and catechists. The curriculum of education around marriage centers on domestic science, hygiene and training in leadership among women. The Church Missionary Society ran such women training centers at Akure in Western Nigeria and at Ogbunike, a few kilometers from Onitsha in the East. The Methodist conducted a center at Ilesha in the West, while the Catholic mission, operating in Eastern Nigeria, joined the race in the late 1930s.

### **Female instruction in the education reform of F.D. Lugard**

If the colonial government stepped in late in the development of education in Nigeria, once on board, it did not hesitate to lay down principles and seek to control the system. This was one of the ambitions of Fredrick Lugard at the political amalgamation of the Colony and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1914. In that year of amalgamation, F.D. Lugard drafted an education ordinance that embodied the new policy of the colonial administration in educational matters. The ordinance, which came into effect in 1916, advocated the principle of co-operation between the government and the voluntary agencies. It allotted to the administration the responsibility of bringing the voluntary agencies in line with the government policy in education, irrespective of financial or non-financial assistance. To effect the government set goals, the 1916 education ordinance stated thus:

- (1) Educational agencies, whether controlled by government or mission should co-operate with the common object, and as far as possible by similar method of discipline and instruction.

- (2) Government should exercise some measure of control over all schools, even though not assisted by grants, and endeavour to bring them in line with the general policy (F.D. Lugard 1920:64).

In 1916, there were about 20,000 pupils enrolled in the Christian missions' unassisted schools whose exact number still remained largely unknown (Lewis 1965:25). In order to curtail the proliferation of unassisted non-supervised schools, and to encourage the existing ones to come under the umbrella of government control, the code replaced the rigid method of grant award on the basis of annual result with a more flexible system. The 1916 education ordinance also spelt out the three types of education required in Nigeria. The first was the literary or western academic style of education. It was geared towards preparing boys to hit the market economy as teachers, clerks, accountants, government and commercial agents. It also trained young men for potential positions of responsibility in the management and administrative sector.

It is in defining the set objectives and the direct beneficiaries of the literary education that F.D. Lugard unmasks his covert exclusion of the female population in quality education. In his amalgamation report of 1920, the then Governor-general of Nigeria alluded explicitly 2 times to boys as the direct beneficiaries of literary education (F.D. Lugard 1920:61). In a similar development, the author of the amalgamation report also named boys as the target for the second type of education: job-oriented technical training. Indeed, F.D. Lugard spelt out the direct beneficiaries of technical education in the following words:

The second-class to which I have referred, includes those who seek a technical or manual training. Most of the openings for such boys are in the railway, marine, public works or printing departments where the machinery driven by steam or electricity is used... Boys who have passed the fourth or fifth standard in a provincial (or non-government) schools will be accepted as apprentices, and trained in batches, their pay rising with each complete year of service, if passed as efficient (F.D. Lugard 1920:63-64)

The third named category of education was elementary schooling. This type of education was aimed at the peasants who sought neither literary education nor the job driven technical training. The objective of this model of instruction was to: "train character and promote habits of discipline, industry and truthfulness (whether Christian or Moslem), and to fit the pupils for life in their own villages, and the improvement of the standard of that life" (F.D. Lugard 1920:64).

The explicit mention of boys as direct beneficiaries of literary and technical education leaves one no room but to lump girls in the third category of rudimentary schooling. It was then common practice of the native population to terminate prematurely girls' education for domestic functions, economic constraint and the demands of early marriage. The colonial administration acquiesced with the practice and adopted it as a policy for female education. Thus, long before the education reform of F.D. Lugard in 1916, the premature termination of girls' education at primary level had become the

practice of the colonial administration. The practice was made known as early as 1930 in the report of the Director of Education.

The native of Southern Nigeria has however no religious objection to the education of women as is found in Mohammedan countries. In many cases natives are quite willing to send young native female children to primary schools, though as a rule these are withdrawn at an early age to follow domestic occupations. The influence of women chiefs and trades in certain parts of the Protectorate seems to point to the non-existence of racial prejudice to female education. The policy of the Education Department is therefore to admit girls to primary school up to the age of fourteen (Public Record Office 1903, C.O. 588/2).

The Lugard education reform of 1916 thus endorsed and reinforced the general practice of low-level education for girls. The colonial administration ran a dual type of education policy for boys and girls. For boys, it was education for potential leadership positions and for posts in the administrative and technical services. For girls, it was education for self-improvement, domestic functions and rural life. The dual education policy left the Nigerian women socially backward, economically impoverished and politically handicapped as potential leaders.

#### **Women in the new phase of greater government control of education.**

1925 marked the beginning of a more aggressive government control of education in the entire British Tropical Africa. This period of government greater control of educational matters was ushered in the publication of the memorandum titled: member of the Advisory Committee that deliberated on the content of the memorandum. The memorandum allotted to the government the right to direct and supervise educational policy for all schools. It accepted the co-existence of government and voluntary agency schools and called for cooperation. The memorandum also advocated mass enlightenment for the common folk and a more literary and professional education for potential African leaders. An extract of the memorandum reads thus:

The first duty of education is to raise the standard alike of character and efficiency of the bulk of people, but provision must also be made for the training of those who are required to fill the posts in administrative and technical services as well as those who as chiefs will occupy position of exceptional trust and responsibility (Cmd: 2347 1925:3)

In 1927, the colonial administration enacted a new education in line with the principles laid down in the "Educational policy in British Tropical Africa". The important features of the ordinance include the following:

1. It demanded a registration of all teachers and that no unregistered person should teach in any school.
2. it gave the Governor the power to control the opening of schools and to close schools considered inefficient on the advice of the Director of education.

3. The Board of Education was enlarged to include representatives of mainline voluntary agencies, in the hope of ensuring co-operation and collecting useful information for policy making.
4. The ordinance also made provisions for voluntary agencies to appoint supervisors to their schools (Education code, Colony and Southern Provinces, 1927).

The code went further to make important changes in the system of awarding grant in aid of education. The efficiency of the schools still remained the criteria as it was in the 1916 code. The grant payable varied according to the percentage of the total amount the school paid as teachers' salary. The regulation laid down the minimum rates for the payment of capitation grant. The minimum was placed at £9 per annum for probationary teachers, £30 for elementary teachers and £40 for higher elementary. Women teachers were rated at two-thirds of the above figures. The women teachers were rated at two-thirds of the above figures. The woman teacher was therefore subjected to receive one-third less than her male counterpart on teaching profession is therefore far less attractive than her male counterpart.

#### **Girls as the least beneficiaries of government increased expenditure in education.**

The 1927 education code can be considered a landmark in the history of education in Nigeria because it gave order and direction to its development and laid the foundation for a system. It made provisions for a more efficient increase of expenditure on education through revisiting the existing system of grant-in-aid of education. Thus, while the government expenditure on education stood at 1.5% of the total revenue for the fiscal year 1922-1923, the figure rose to 5% from 1926 to 1929 (L.J. Lewis 1965:39). It is however pertinent to ascertain the direct beneficiaries of the increased expenditure in education. To this effect, the statistics of the annual education report for the year 1928 are very revealing (annual Education Report, Southern Provinces, 1928). The figures of the average attendance for primary and secondary schools, displayed in the tables below, are drawn from the report. The overall percentage of girls has been worked to reflect and highlight disparity in the education of boys and girls both from perspective of the government and the Christian missions' agencies.

**Table Average attendance in Government primary schools in 1928.**

Province	N of Sch.	Boys	Girls	Total	% of Girls
Colony	5	584	79	663	11.9%
Benin	14	1,994	136	2,130	6.3%
Calabar	6	1,356	67	1,423	4.7%
Ijebu	---	---	---	---	---
Ogoja	2	225	17	272	6.2%
Ondo	1	132	13	145	8.9%
Onitsha	3	781	24	805	2.9%
Owerri	7	1,512	107	1,619	6.6%
Oyo	1	197	28	225	12.4%
Warri	4	707	105	812	12.9%
Total	49	8,440	703	9,143	7.6%

The Benin province comes up as the highest beneficiary of government funded education with a total number of 14 schools and 2, 130 school children. Yet only 6.3% girls are beneficiaries of the government education fund. The Owerri province, with a total number of 7 schools, registers only 6.6% of girls out of the 1,619 pupils receiving education in government schools, scores highest with 12.9% and is followed by Oyo with 12.4%. Lagos provinces rates third, providing 11. 9% girls education in its 5 schools. On the whole, only 7.6% of female population is beneficiary of the government funded schools as against 92.3% of the male population.

**Table 2. Average attendance in Christian mission assisted primary schools in 1928.**

Province	Denomination	No of school	Boys	Girls	Total	% of Girls
Colony	Anglican	11	1,720	803	2,523	38.8%
	Roman Catholic	7	1,130	916	2,046	44.7%
	Wesleyan	7	894	365	1259	28.90%
	African Church	2	250	78	328	23.7%
	American Baptist	1	258	95	353	26.9%
	Total	28	4,252	2,257	6,509	34.6%
Abeokuta	Anglican	9	931	286	1,217	23.5%
	Roman Catholic	2	230	146	376	38.8%
	Wesleyan	4	339	91	430	21.1%
	American Baptist	1	115	---	115	---
	Total	16	1,615	523	2,138	24.4%
Calabar	United F. Church	22	3,414	1,403	4,817	29.1%
	Roman Catholic	3	536	262	798	32.8%
	Qua Ibo	8	870	130	1,000	13%
	Methodist	8	1,081	122	1,203	10.1%
	Wesleyan	3	344	23	367	6.2%
	N.Delta pastorate	2	180	42	222	18.9%
	African Church	2	491	159	650	24.4%
	Total	48	6,916	2,141	9,057	23.6%
Ijebu	Anglican	20	2,225	863	3,088	27.9%
	African Bethel	1	184	45	229	19.6%
	Wesleyan	5	597	306	903	33.8%
	Total	26	3,006	1,214	4,220	28.7%
Ogoja	United F. Church	2	157	15	172	8.7%
	Roman Catholic	1	47	3	50	6%
	Total	3	204	18	222	8.1%
Ondo	Anglican	21	1,279	364	1,643	22.1%
	Undenominational	1	80	---	80	---
Onitsha	Anglican	13	2,194	459	2,653	17.3%
	Roman Catholic	14	3,055	262	3,255	8%
Owerri	N. Delta Pastorate	9	1,508	279	1,787	20.6%
	United F. Church	7	783	46	829	5.5%
	Methodist	7	989	59	1,048	5.6%
	Roman Catholic	5	847	3	850	0.3%

	Anglican	4	682	140	822	17%
	S. Day Adventist	1	102	7	109	6.4%
	African Church	1	128	6	134	4.4%
	N. Delta Native	1	95	4	99	4%
	N. Delta Baptist	1	89	3	92	3.2%
	Christ A. Church	1	88	5	93	5.3%
	Total	37	5,311	552	5,863	9.4%
Oyo	Anglican	21	1,378	570	1,948	29.2%
	Roman Catholic	4	271	120	391	30.6%
	Wesleyan	7	441	148	589	25.1%
	American Baptist	4	227	107	334	32%
	Total	36	2,317	945	3,262	28.9%
Warri	Anglican	5	611	79	690	11.4%
	Grand total	266	32,967	8,960	41,865	21.4%

This statistics representation of the Christian missions' primary education activity is as interesting as it is curious to analyse. It indicates which of the Christian denomination educates the highest number of girls and the area of concentration of its activity. The Roman Catholic mission scores highest Lagos Colony where it educates 44.7%, thanks to the efforts of the Sisters of Our Lady of Apostles. On the contrary, in Owerri province, the Catholic mission educates a total population of 850 pupils with only 3 girls in their midst, giving it 0.3%. In Onitsha province, the mission caters for only 8% of primary schools girls in its schools. The number goes up again at Abeokuta province with 38.8% of girls receive Catholic education through the remarkable work of Sr. Mary primary schools spread across 6 provinces, but only 1,712 of these children are girls, that is, barely ¼ of the total population.

The Anglican mission provides education for 27.3% for girls at Ijebu-Ode 38.8%. In Onitsha province, the Anglican mission educates 2 times more girls than the Catholic mission, with its 17.3% as against 8% of the Catholics. The Anglican mission educational work for young girls stands at 29.2% at Oyo province, 23.5% at Abeokuta and 22.1% at Ondo where it is the sole champion. On the whole, the Anglican mission works in 9 out of the 10 provinces represented in the 1928 education report. It holds the highest number of schools with 104 primary schools, but educates only 3,564 girls out of a total population of 14,584 pupils under its care.

The Wesleyan mission leads in the education of girls at Ijebu province with 33.9% girls attending its primary schools. The number drops to 25.1% at Oyo province and slumps to 6.2% at Calabar province. The mission activity is limited to 5 out of the 10 provinces represented.

Of the three missions analysed, the Wesleyan mission provides 26.4% of girls' education within its 26 primary schools spread 5 out of 10 provinces. The Anglican mission records 24.4% and owns 104 primary schools in 9 provinces. The Roman Catholic mission work among girls is rated at 23.2%. The mission controls 36 assisted primary schools in 7 provinces. Each of the three missions educates single-handedly more girls than the government with 7.6%

**Table 3. Secondary education in government and assisted schools in 1928.**

	<b>School</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Government	King's College	156	---
	Queen's College	---	43
	Bonny	11	---
	Warri	19	---
Anglican	Grammar School, Lagos	61	---
	Grammar School, Abeokuta	19	---
	Grammar School, Ibadan	14	---
	Grammar School, Ijebu	18	---
	Girls High School, Ijebu	---	2
	Girls High School, Lagos	---	8
	Dennis Memorial School; Onitsha	80	---
Roman Catholic	St. Gregory, Lagos	63	---
Wesleyan	Boys High School, Lagos	36	---
	Elekuro, Ibadan	10	---
United Free Church	Hope Waddell Institute, Calabar	45	---
	Duke town, Calabar	17	---
Primitive Methodist	Uzuakoli Institute	25	---
American Baptist	Baptist Academy, Lagos	24	---
Undenominational	Boys High School, Ondo	14	---
	<b>Total</b>	<b>612</b>	<b>53</b>

The empty spaces in the column for girls in table 3 speak eloquently of the position of girls' secondary education in 1928. While the government educates 43 girls in its secondary school primary school curriculum. One is therefore left with the gloomy picture of 53 girls' secondary education in Nigeria.

The bleak position of female education, with regards to both the content of instruction and numerical strength, remained unchanged until 1930 when the colonial administration decided to set up a common syllabus for both sexes. Article 78 of the educational policy 1930 reads thus:

It is recognized that throughout the country generally, the elementary stage of education will be given in mixed schools and that the syllabus for boys and girls will be identical, with the exception that special subjects, such as training in agriculture and other hand work (Public Record Office 1930, C.O.583/173/4).

While the than Director of education, E.R. J. Hussey began to acknowledge the necessity to upgrade girls' education at the elementary level, he was still in no doubt influenced by the paternalist Victorian ethos which worked under the assumption that female education was for domestic functions and the male for public life. Seventeen years after, in 1947 precisely, the numerical strength of girls was 7.1% in the voluntary agency schools (S. Phillipson 1948: 109).

The weak position of girls in obtaining formal literary education, under colonial government, reflected the strong absence of women in holding strategic posts at the dawn of the political independence in Nigerian republic, 1960-1965, witnessed an unprecedented male dominance in political affair with no female ministers at both the federal and regional levels (J.M Nasir 2002:47). In the second republic, only three women occupied executive posts as ministers in the federal cabinet. At state level, the government contented itself with the token appointment of a woman commissioner in the state cabinet. Even in the contemporary political situation in Nigeria, S.O. Oyedele has rightly noted that the attainment of effective participation of more women in political to the extent if effecting change is yet to become reality (S.O. Oyedele 2002:74).

### **Conclusion**

The overall feeble position of female education in comparison to the male counterpart did not augur well for the social, economic and political development of women in Nigeria. At a time when literary education was becoming the master key to a successful life in modern society, the different agencies responsible for the instruction of the Nigerian youth invested in upgrading the formation of boys to the detriment of girls. Consequently, the male population attained a faster and higher level of social advancement. From the economic perspective, the colonial and missionary education entrenched structurally the cult of gender-oriented domestication of women, which stood at variance with the Nigerian women's strong economic contribution in the traditional society. The colonial and missionary policy of education also encouraged a systematic reduction of women to low- paid or unwaged labour. The uneducated or half-educated woman could not compete with the better- educated man in the job market or professional life. Politically, the gross denial of literary education to Nigerian girls undermined and delayed the chances of women's participation in policy making and in the leadership of the nation.

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