

Feminist Philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir and Implications for Nigerian Education: A Philosophical Reflection

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Abstract: *In this study, an attempt was made to examine the feminist Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir and implications for Nigerian Education. The objectives of the Study were; to examine the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir as it relates to Nigerian education, also to identify the challenges of using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir to promote education in Nigeria: The meaning of feminist philosophy was given as a theory whereby women are to be economically, politically and socially equal to their male counterpart and should be treated accordingly. The researcher adopted a philosophical research design using the philosophical methods; speculative, prescriptive, analytic and criticism methods to explore Simone de Beauvoir feminist ideas. The methods used were non-empirical and entirely a library-based method. Sources of data included books written by Simone de Beauvoir and other authors who have written extensively on feminism, these were used to assess Beauvoir's concept in line with Nigeria educational System as it is in Nigeria today. The findings of the study revealed that the ways Beauvoir's feminist philosophy relates to Nigerian education were through; development of an authentic self of the child, development of self- realization of the child, preparation of the child to face tragic situation of life, and preparation of the child for social adjustment. The study concluded that education is a human right and an essential tool for the achievement of equality goals, development and peace. However, the study recommended that approach to using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir in promoting education in Nigeria has some challenges. Therefore, there is need to reexamine the approaches to education in Nigeria from Simone de Beauvoir's stand point.*

Keywords: *Philosophical Reflection, Feminist Philosophy, Simone De Beauvoir Philosophy, Nigerian Education.*

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Introduction

It is a demographic fact in modern period of societal development that the number of women is in constant increase in relation to number of men, that is, for a long time women make more than half of population, while been marginalized in public spheres. Today, a woman can be found in production, from factories to administration and managing positions (Madunagu, 2008). She is not only an irreplaceable support, but an active participant of all changes and movements in modern era. Since the beginning of 20th century, until today, women have significant active role on the world's social, economic and political stage. In the area of rights (both subjective and objective meaning of term) women have achieved, in principle, equal status with men. They were waiting for nearly two centuries that idea of equality become truly "human right" (Hooks, 2000).

However, up till today, there are still discrepancies between formal and real rights. Women's right to work is been obstructed, as in political, economic and cultural area, as well as in every other area. Abagana, (2013) affirmed that "woman of modern society is also biggest minority" that exists. Even though mathematically demographic majority, woman in patriarchal society has minority status. French writer Simone (1956) wrote how that authentic human being, by time become the woman a victim of tradition in dominant male culture.

As the woman through historical practice generally was excluded from politics, but also from production and all other important functions of society, both through ages theory was neither dealing with (nor giving significance) to the status of women in given social-cultural and economic environment. Almost whole life of that invisible woman took place inside family, far away from public eyes and public importance, with strictly defined rules according to sex, and gender (Sirleaf, 2009). In short terms, woman as "woman" is a product of social norms and rules which are male product.

Estimation of a woman as inferior being, formed based on biological and sexual delusions, is expressed not only in, for woman depreciative sayings and songs, but also in conceptions of philosophers, psychologists and statesmen. In that respect, famous misogynist Arthur Schopenhauer is cited, both with Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. For example, Napoleon Bonaparte his opinion on woman, as an inferior being in relation to man, legalized for a whole century in "Code civile", greatest monument of bourgeois law and code of woman's imparity. Therefore, Karl Marx set a thesis, which he took from Charles Fourier, claiming that "level of woman's emancipation is natural measure of general emancipation" (Smythe, 2018) Today, the position of woman is complex not only because of her economic, but also her demographic role. She is not only labour force, but she must give birth as well. She is simultaneously productive and reproductive power in society (Smythe, 2014).

Feminists considered that appearance of modern organizations and bureaucratic carriers came as aftermath of specific gender configuration. Feminists outlined two ways of gender implementation into structure of modern organizations. Firstly, bureaucracies are distinguished by gender segregation on work place. When women became significant part of labour force, they were assigned to poor paid working positions on which they performed routine tasks. Chances for promotion were minimal. Secondly, bureaucratic career, by feminists, alluded male career, in which key part of a woman was giving support. At work place, women performed routine jobs, so men can focus on getting a promotion. In the sphere of family, women also supported career advancement of men by taking care of house and raising children, so men can focus strictly on work. These two tendencies led to modern organizations become male reservation in which women were excluded from the government, without a chance to advance, and that, in addition, become victims of sexual harassment.

A research which had been carried out in 21 countries Snyder and Tadesse, (2017), showed that women on managing position are still grouped on lower management levels and in traditionally women's sectors of care, education and health services, and not in those with highest incomes, like energy, information technologies (IT) and transport industry. They are still underpaid to male colleagues on all levels of the hierarchy ladder, including board of directors and are hardly make breach through "glass ceiling" which stops them from reaching top management functions and positions. That is also the case in the USA where women take 45% of managing positions, but make only 5% of top management the percentage with small variations during last quarter of 20th and first decade of 21st century (Shattuck, 2018). The movement towards gender equality therefore emanated from the Western world and it started with the suffragette movement of the late-19th century which led to a change in relation to women's property rights in marriage.

Gradually the awareness for gender equality increased and escalated in the 60s as agitation for gender equality amplified giving rise to movements like women liberation and feminism. These movements emphasized women's rights and insisted that women should have equal rights with men. Literally, this means that indeed, what a man can do a woman can do also but the originators emphasized the rights of women to work in paid employment and also to vote. This is understandable as women in Western culture before the 19th century manned the home, did domestic works, were lonely and were not economically empowered.

The situation in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular was different as women were economically empowered as they engaged in small business ventures, interacted with one another individually or in groups as sisters, wives, age grades, etc., and contributed to building their families so to some extent, actualized themselves. There was therefore no need for an agitation for equality with men. Women wield economic powers and social influence in their communities yet find it difficult to counter their subordination to and humiliation by men. Some women try to counter this age-long tradition, but unfortunately, by asserting themselves wrongly thereby creating more problems than solving the existing ones For instance, some women abandon their homes "preferring their profession to marriage, some of them use men to have children without entering into a domestic arrangement. It is therefore not uncommon to hear the expression "what a man can do a woman can do also or even better" but one hardly hears "what a woman can do, a man can do also". Both expressions are wrong as there are specific roles for specific gender.

The agitation for equality assumed different dimensions with the multiplicity of the movements with each one focusing on a specific issue championing their causes through campaigns, writings, conferences, workshops, seminars and pressure groups. The expectation was that the crusades would culminate in the elimination of the oppression and subjugation of women and entrenchment a platform for self-actualization and empowerment. This desire has remained a mirage though some appreciable achievements have been recorded as there is hardly any occupation that is regarded as an exclusive preserve of a particular gender. For instance, now, women serve in the armed forces and other military and Para-military professions, engineering

and an increasing number of women are active in politics and occupy high positions in business in many countries of the world. Some countries like India, Britain, Philippines, Liberia and other countries have had women presidents /prime ministers.

In Nigeria, the story is not so different as names like Queen Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin and Moremi of Ife, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Otunba Bola Kuforiji Olubi, Prof. Dora Akunyili, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams, Prof. Akachi Ezeigbo, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwueme, Zainab Alkali, Onyeka Onwenu, Hon. Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar, and many others have excelled in different spheres of human endeavour, this then translates to gender equality in Nigeria.

The campaign for women emancipation and gender equality in Nigeria took a different perspective as scholars disagree on the issue of women oppression. Some of them agree that Nigerian women have been living in bondage, others oppose that view and cite some notable

women in history to support their view. This argument does not suffice because Nigerian society is basically a patriarchal one which subordinates' women. A woman is seen as an object for the man's delights from his belly to his groin consequently this assertion: is it possible "that a woman that I paid to get with my hard earned money should challenge me in my house? Does she think that I carry these balls between my thighs for nothing...the gods of the land ordained that a man must own a wife to bear him children. I don't want to come home and not find my food and woman waiting for me" (Talbot, 2010). Another man asks his wife: "Did I not pay your bride price, Am I not your owner?" (Szmata & Michael, 2016). A woman is therefore trained from childhood to internalize an inferiority complex as she is prepared for the role of a wife and mother, her ultimate ambition being how to satisfy her husband. In the traditional society and even in some cultures now, her consent is not usually needed in the transaction of selling or buying her. Luckily, the trend is changing but has not obliterated women oppression and marginalization in families, communities, work places, politics and other spheres of life and this is inimical to the sustainable development of our nation.

This notwithstanding, the idea of gender equality in the society is utopian because no two individuals can be equal. The adherents of gender equality should focus on equal opportunities for empowerment and self-actualization for every individual irrespective of gender. Few women who were given opportunities have proved their mettle and marched with thundering steps on grounds men feared to tread. Dora Akunyili's achievements in NAFDAC are still fresh in the mind. It is difficult to discuss gender equality without mentioning Feminism, a movement that initiated the struggle for women's rights and gender equality. It originated from the Western World and with liberal and radical feminism as its major offshoots. The liberal feminists stress gender equality through political and legal reforms with a focus on the ability of women to reflect their equality through their actions and choices. They see women are rational and normal human beings who should be treated as such. They therefore preach against a system that devalues women and the work they do. They emphasize harmonious co-existence of men and women through the reversal of male-oriented structures in the society and building a home where women and men can live freely together.

The notion of feminism has provoked the echo of many feminine voices. Tatli, (2012), an American feminist asserts that the true test of a woman's freedom is not her ability to earn her living but her ability to control pregnancy and birth. Hence, no woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother. At the very beginning of the first chapter of her second volume of *The Second Sex (Deuxième Sexe)*, de Beauvoir contends that one is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman. She argues that formative stages and processes of socialization condition women to accept weak, passive and dependency nature. She delineated education of women as a significant factor that enhances the intellectual ability of women and aids them to rise to equal with their male counterparts. The second wave of feminism owed its inspiration to the monumental 1949 publication of the French philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir titled *The Second Sex: Woman as Other*, which served as the catalyst for the challenge of patriarchal *status quo* that favoured men's domination over women.

Being conscientized of their conditions of their time, women expressed great sense of injustice and demanded for social, political, legal, educational and personal liberation to help them take control of their destiny. Her work targeted Plato's affirmation that sex is an accidental quality and that men and women are equally qualified to belong to the guardian class but the price of women's admittance into this privileged class is women of his time. According to him, subordination of women is wrong in itself and at the same time clogs the wheel of development by almost half the population.

Again, the gender apartheid places the girl-child in a disadvantaged position, where her potential is suppressed, and self-actualization is not achieved. She, therefore, becomes a victim of a pre-existing social-cultural male chauvinism. Furthermore, on the account of gender, girl-child is subjected to all multiple forms of operations exploitation and discrimination. For any society to developed and is not lopsided, the girl-child should be given quality education. Girls' education is a strategic development priority. Better educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, should they choose to become mothers. They are more likely to participate in the formal labour market and earn higher incomes. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty.

According to UNESCO estimates, around the world, 132 million girls are out of school, including 34.3 million of primary school age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age, and 67.4 million of upper-secondary school age. In countries affected by conflict (for instance Northeast Nigeria), girls are more than twice more likely to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries. And in many countries, among girls who do enter primary school, only a small portion will reach and far fewer will complete secondary school. Girl-child education has then become a major issue of concern in most developing countries of the world today, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where many young girls do not attend school.

According to UNICEF as cited by Stunkel, (2019), the global figure for out-of-school children is estimated to be 121 million, out of which 65 million (approximately 53.8%) were girls and over 80

percent of these girls live in sub-Saharan Africa. Primary school completion rates in Africa have been the lowest in the world and this remains a concern as half of the world's out-of-school children (OOSC) are concentrated in 15 countries, eight of which are in sub-Saharan Africa (Syomwene, & Kindiki, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24million in 2002 (Offorma, 2009).

In Nigeria, pervasive gender ideologies at the household and community levels always favour boys over girls and promote differential educational opportunities and outcomes. Socio-cultural beliefs and custom influence decision to enrol girls in schools, decision to withdraw them from schools and decision to drop out of school and indeed, their academic performance as well as grade level attainment. Also, the sociocultural expectation of girls and the priority accorded to their future roles as mothers and wives have a strong negative bearing on their formal education. The girl-child is discriminated against by virtue of her sex, the structure of the society, its values, traditions, and institutions all have an in-built discrimination against women. The assigning of different expectations to male or female has made the traditional society in the past years to believe that it is not natural for a female child to be educated. As such, the illiterate parents prefer to have their female children doing some domestic works at home.

Traditional beliefs to some extent hamper the girl-child education. It ranges from the fact that girls do not carry on the family name like boys. If at all they send their children, it is limited to the male children who according to such parents would occupy their place in the case of death. As such, every available means is used to train the boys at the detriment of girls because of their important role in protecting the "family name". It is therefore the thrust of this study to examine the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir and its implications for Nigerian education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the significance of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy and implications for Nigerian education. To this end, the study intends to specifically achieve the following objectives:

- 2) To examine the Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy as it relates to Nigerian education.
- 3) To determine the issues that necessitated the concept of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy in relation to women education in Nigeria.
- 4) To analyse ways, the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir can be used to promote education in Nigeria.
- 5) To identify the challenges of using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir to promote education in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. In what ways do the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir relate to Nigerian education?
2. What are the issues that necessitated Simone de Beauvoir's feminist philosophy as it relates to women education in Nigeria?
3. In what ways can the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir be used to promote women education in Nigeria?
4. What are the challenges faced in using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir in promoting education in Nigeria?

Methodology

The study adopted a Philosophical research design. Philosophical research design does not lend itself to empirical approaches (Akinpelu, 2005). Philosophical research method is to clarify meanings, make values manifest, identify ethics, and study the nature of knowledge. The philosophical research method is expected to consider a philosophical question from all perspectives by examining conceptual meaning, raising further questions, proposing answers, and suggesting the implications of those answers.

The sources of data used in the research work are secondary sources which refers to works of Simone de Beauvoir on feminist philosophy and other authors who have written extensively on feminism. They are works of authors found in journals, websites and other materials. Data were collected from books, especially books that are relevant to the topic under discussion. Journals and information from the internet and websites would be extensively used. Data analysis was conducted using speculative approach, prescriptive approach, analytical approach and critical approach.

Result

Research Question 1: In What Ways do the Feminist Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir Relate to Nigerian education?

The rationale of the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir on education is to provide an extensive and comprehensive experience with life in all its forms. For her, the aim of education is humanitarian and humanist. The basic purpose of education is to enable each individual to develop his or her fullest potential for self-fulfilment (FRN, 2013). The ways feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir relate to Nigerian education comprise the following:

i. Development of the authentic self of the child: The first and foremost aim of Beauvoir education is to develop the authentic self of the child. Nigerian education is also aimed at liberating and empowering the students towards authentic, autonomous and creative life (FRN, 2013). Education is to create consciousness for self. Persons do not only have mind, but also feelings and emotions.

Development of self-realization in the child: Education is to help the child to achieve self-realization. The student should become personally concerned with the realization of his own nature and with what Tatli (2012), calls the courage to be himself. Simone de Beauvoir believes that a good education is one that assists each of us in seeing ourselves with our fears, frustrations and hopes, as well as the ways in which we use reason for good and bad. The first step in any education, therefore, is to understand ourselves. Simone de Beauvoir advocated an education that develops in individual the ability of self-overcoming. For Beauvoir, education is simply a means and not a self-contained telos.

iii Preparation of the child to face tragic situations of life: Every individual has to face many tragic situations in his/her life. The most important and inevitable tragic event is death. One of the main aims of Simone de Beauvoir existentialism is to inculcate proper attitude towards death. Teachers must make student to realize that death is not just negative but it has positive sides also.

iv Inculcating in students the ability to make rational choices: Education should train men to make better choices, and also give the idea that since his choices are never perfect, consequences cannot be predicted. Life is a continuous process of making choices and all choices are personal and individual.

Preparation of the child for social adjustment: Another aim of existential education of Simone de Beauvoir is to prepare the child for social adjustment. Education should be such that it makes the student able to see beyond personal interest and goal. In relation to Nigerian educational goal, education is an instrument for social change and adjustment (FRN, 2013). Beauvoir stated that social education should teach respect for the freedom of all.

Research Question 2: What are the Issues that Necessitated Simone de Beauvoir's Feminist Philosophy as it relates to Women Education in Nigeria?

Simone De Beauvoir's major focus was feminist ideology. Women liberation has been a perennial issue, not only in the western world but also in Africa. Feminism stands to challenge a mannerism in this existential universe that puts men in charge of the public sphere and relegated women to the background. In her work, "The Second Sex", Simone de Beauvoir saw the concept of history, biology and society as the hindrances to women liberation. She thought that since the value of women are learned through history, biology, society and culture; women can create more equal societies by relearning the societal values. The oppression of women by men on the basis of gender is truly illegitimate and unjustified. Historically, gender inequality can be traced back to Aristotle's declaration that "the female is female by virtue of a particular inability".

Thomas Aquinas' belief that "a woman is an imperfect man and an incidental being". It is on this note that *The Second Sex* recognizes the problems of women, encapsulated in their oppression and unjustified attitude of history, men, culture, and society towards them. This made de

Beauvoir to approach the problem of women from the continental traditions of existentialism and phenomenology. Her discussion was based on the mythical, cultural,

Historical, psychoanalytical mechanisms of the oppression that left women to be recognized as “other,” “inessential” and “passive,” while recognizing men as “the subject” and “essential” (Grace, 2010).

Research Question 3: In What Ways Can the Feminist Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir be used to Promote Women Education?

The ways the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir can be used to promote education in Nigeria is by creating dependable, responsible and honest citizen for the purpose of national stability and development and this is in line with the National Policy on Education. Her feminist philosophy should on:

1. developing and changing the Nigerian children into responsible and capable citizens
2. Creating familiarity with one’s political and civil right obligations and commitments as a citizen of this great country and valuing the privileges of different citizens.
3. Helping the young ones both male and female to get a feeling of loyalty, trustworthiness and diligence, discipline, courage, commitment, appreciation, patriotism etc.

Another way the feminist philosophy of Beauvoir can be used to promote education in Nigeria values should be imparted through professional and effective teaching which prepares the learner even for the learning of other school subjects. Without these values being properly and skilfully inculcated into the younger generation by experts, no strong foundation is set for them for their own development and the development of the society. Also it can be promoted through the followings: Personality development, National Development, Personality Development and National development, Popular Participation,

Research Question 4: What are the Challenges Faced in Using the Feminist Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir in Promoting Education in Nigeria?

The challenges faced in using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir in promoting education in Nigeria are such hindrances or factors which include culture or orientation factor, family factor, religious factor, patriarchal factor, marriage and reproduction factor, societal factor, dependence or idleness, etc.

Culture or Orientation Factor

The concept of culture seems to be an intractable word which appears difficult to define because it embraces tangible and non- tangible aspect of reality in all human societies. However, culture

is seen generally as shared belief and values of group such as the belief, customs, practices, and social behaviour of particular nation or people.

Family Factor

Family is the cradle of civil virtues." It comprises a group of people who are closely related by birth, marriage or adoption."68 It means people living together and functioning as a single household, usually consisting of parents and their children. It also constitutes a single household and interacting with one another in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, children and siblings.

Religious Factor

Religion means "a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances." It is an institutionalized or personal system of belief and practices relating to the divine. It is also personal beliefs or values, a set of strongly held belief, values and attitudes that somebody lives by.

Patriarchal Factor

This is another factor that is regarded as a means of hindrance to women liberation. Patriarchal is relating to or characteristics of a culture in which men are the most powerful member. De Beauvoir (1960) observes that patriarchy is another hindrance to the woman, hence oppressive towards women. In her words, humanity is a male and male defines woman not in herself but as relative to him. Man can think of himself without woman, but woman cannot think of herself without man.

Conclusions

From the foregoing, this study concludes that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace, and that non-discriminatory education benefits both boys and girls and thus ultimately contributes to more equal and critical relationship between men and women, and promotes gender equity in education system. The study further observes that education creates a healthy, educated and productive human resource base. It is time therefore to begin to do the right thing to train and educate our girls. The study establishes that educating men and women is a key to economic and social growth and sustainable development in all countries. Raising the education levels and literacy rates of women is one of the most effective investments for increasing female productivity as well as enhancing the wellbeing of families and children. In some areas where women are becoming more educated than men. In developing countries, reducing gender inequality in literacy and in primary and secondary education is essential to reducing poverty and accelerating economic development.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. Government at federal, state and local level should ensure that Nigerian education system should assist in the development of self-realisation and unique personality in both male and female children
2. The Nigerian education system should be able to effectively inculcate into its citizens' full knowledge of their inalienable rights as well as the value of respecting the rights of others.
3. It is said that ignorance is the worst disease, and that people perish for lack of knowledge. For this reason, there should be a radical and consistent nation-wide sensitisation of citizens of their rights and obligations. Such sensitization should be all inclusive and should begin from the classroom to the large society.
4. The approach to using the feminist philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir in promoting education in Nigeria has some upsets. Therefore, there is need to re-examine the

Nigerian education policies from the Simone de Beauvoir standpoint with a view to placing high premium on women education and gender parity.

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