GENDER AND AFRICAN EDUCATION:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

by

Rosina Agyepong

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Education
Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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0-612-58887-4
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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical and conceptual analysis of research on gender issues in African education. Most women in Africa still receive less schooling than men despite the expansion of educational opportunities after independence. The gender gap becomes more apparent beyond primary level where men greatly outnumber women in schools. Currently research on gender issues in African education shows that the educational structures tend to perpetuate the existing order rather than address gender disparity. This thesis suggests that educational systems and policy makers in Africa will have to consider the problems associated with gender inequality in education and respond appropriately.

The conclusion raises questions of what approaches should be adopted to study female education in Africa and what additional research is required in this field. It also suggests strategies, directions and a conceptual model for the future.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank the Lord Jesus Christ to whom I owe everything. Without him this work would not have been possible; he strengthened and sustained me through this work.

Many thanks to Dr. George Sefa Dei and Dr. Kari Dehli for sharing their experience, insightful comments and suggestions on educational reform. They assisted me at every stage of the process of writing this thesis. I thank them for their suggestions, encouragement and hardwork; they were always available when I had a problem or a request.

I am also indebted to my teachers and staff at OISE and many others who generously gave their time and energy to review this thesis and advise me.

I want to thank my husband, children, parents, brothers, sisters and friends for their encouragement and support and who have endured the time it took to do this work.

I am also very grateful to my mother in-law who offered her assistance by babysitting my children in order that I pursue my academic pursuits.

Finally sincere thanks go to all whose help and encouragement went a long way to help me complete this thesis. All errors remain mine.
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Chapter One

Introduction

For the past several years, education in Africa has been a subject of intense scholarly research and controversy. There has been a substantial amount of research on gender and education in Africa. The literature examines the effects that culture, religion, government neglect, school practices, teachers' attitudes and school materials have on the education of females in Africa. Most of the research reveals wide gender gaps in enrollment in educational institutions in Africa. Some investigators have focused on access (Kelly and Elliot, 1982; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995); others have examined the women's experience in programs and their dropout or success rates (King and Hill, 1991; Browne and Barret, 1991; Ker Conway and Bourque, 1993; Bloch, Beoku-Betts and Tabachnik, 1998; Leach, 1998).

Most sub-Saharan African countries have tried independently, and with the assistance of international agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to expand and make education accessible to larger numbers of the population. Universalization of primary education in Africa has increased participation in formal education in the last two decades, but significant gender gaps persist despite the growth in female enrollment and widen as one goes up the education ladder.

My central concern in this thesis is the access to, and participation of, females in secondary and tertiary education. This thesis will review a selection of studies on women and education in Africa and analyze how the issues of women and education in Africa have been researched and theorized. This thesis examines why African women still lag
behind men despite all the research done and the recommendations put forward to improve women’s lives. It examines how gender has been understood in the works, how the local subjects themselves understand gender and education, what questions can be asked about gender and education and what new insights can be brought to the works.

The central focus of this work is to raise the awareness; to demonstrate that even though much research has been done on the subject, there is still the prevalence of systemic exclusion and the subordination of women. I suggest that writers, researchers and educators emphasize in their works the need to rethink the concept of gender and reform African education in order to achieve gender equity in education.

From the outset I have to acknowledge that Africa and African women are not homogeneous categories. While there are some cultural similarities among various countries in Africa, the term “Africa” or “African women” are not intended to suggest homogeneous groups. Similarly, countries in sub-Saharan Africa differ along ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic, class, racial and cultural lines yet share common experiences of colonialism and neocolonialism and beyond (Asante, 1987; Asante, 1991; Gyekye, 1987 and Dei 1998). The degree to which one woman may be oppressed varies as a result of some of the factors mentioned above.

It is worth noting that not only do women share similar educational experiences throughout sub-Saharan Africa but also their status is similarly evaluated. How they confront, acknowledge or deal with issues are culturally determined. However, I write this thesis with the understanding that generalizations are necessary.
Ideas and beliefs are rooted in one's own lived experiences, historical and cultural realities, political outlook and economic position. For this reason, it is necessary to specify who I am and what brings me to write about this topic. I approach the topic, gender and education in Africa from my location as a Ghanaian-Canadian female, educated in Ghana and Canada, who has a deep concern about the gender gap that becomes apparent beyond the basic level of education despite the expansion of educational opportunities in Africa. I therefore bring to this thesis, two sets of lenses: those of an insider and of an outsider, which give me a broader perspective to understand gender issues in both systems. Finally, to the extent that I am interested in seeing improvement both in the lives of women and an improvement in gender equity at all levels of education in Africa, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels, I would call myself a feminist. I share the view of Steady (1987) who argues for “a cooperation between men and women where they operate jointly to maintain a cosmological balance” (p.8). As feminism insists the personal is political, so my experiences as a mother, wife, student, friend and middle-class Ghanaian-Canadian woman who works in association with men in all these situations shape my analysis in this thesis.

As a female in the field of education, I am convinced that if educators and policy makers in Africa devote substantial time and effort to ensure that women have equal access to quality education, African women will have increased life chances and gain better employment opportunities. Equality of opportunity, as understood today, does not mean merely enriching programs to help girls “catch up” with boys (Gaskell, McLaren, and Novogrodsky, 1989). The aim must be to increase the respect and the material rewards associated with what women do, as well as encourage access for women to areas
that traditionally have been dominated by men. There is therefore an urgent need to improve and expand research on gender issues in order to reform African education. Such research if acted upon will contribute in no small way to change the situation in which the majority of African women find themselves.

**Definition of Terms**

I acknowledge that terms are constructed and imbued with meaning through historical contexts; a term may carry a certain meaning and wield power in a certain way in one historical period, but at another time the same term may convey a different idea and play a different role in shaping the power dynamics of policy and action. Therefore the commonsense meaning of terms like education, gender, equity and development as used in this thesis are likely to change in different historical and regional contexts (Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Appiah, 1992; Said, 1978).

“Education” is usually associated with terms such as “development,” “modernity,” “independence” and “status”. Education and development represent crossroads that bring together academics, politicians, planners, practitioners and people in the pursuit of the world’s biggest and perhaps most exciting challenge (Fägerlind and Saha, 1989). Education may be defined as the varied ways, strategies and options through which people come to know their world and act within it. Education may also be described as a relationship between power and knowledge that governs our understanding, our constructs of self and others and our actions (Friere, 1997). Education, both within and outside schools, can operate as a form of governance by a state, colonial power or a religious group or leader over those who are constructed as being in need of education. Although the effects of schooling or education are often beneficial to
individuals, education may also be constricting and exclusive of others (Bloc and Vavrus, 1998; Dei, 1994, 1998 and 1999; Friere, 1997; Leach, 1998). Having defined education, it is also important to distinguish between "education" and "schooling". Schooling refers to the formal structures and procedures of going to school. "Education" happens at many sites and in many contexts – schools, universities, work places, homes, communities, arts and media (Dei, 1998; Shujaa, 1994).

In the context of modernization, education is usually assigned two major roles: human-power training and socialization. Educational systems reflect the values and practices of the larger society. Education through schooling is the formal institutionalized and systematized vehicle that socializes youth into the values of society. Education is not a benign good at every moment of its historical path; rather it is a set of practices that have been used differently by individuals, groups, governments and international agencies depending on their intention, power and conceptions of gender. Education should be a way to promote individuals, groups and national or international interests but apparently this has not always been the case. For women in Africa, education in general terms, governs, disempowers and regulates the lives of women (Bloch, Beoku-Betts and Tabachnik, 1998; Sweetman, 1998; Leach 1998).

Arguably, the educational system in Africa has remained essentially the same as that which was introduced by the colonialists. Even after independence, it hardly changed (Njeuma, 1993; Odora, 1993). The growth in Africa of western style formal education has created a totally new dilemma for women, one in which both their absence and presence in schools act to their disadvantage. On the one hand, their absence from school makes it difficult for them to compete with men for the scarce jobs. On the other hand,
being present at school in growing numbers ends up reinforcing their dependence on men (Robertson, 1985; Hollos, 1998).

Recent developments in feminist analyses have produced complex explanations of gender differences in education. “Gender” refers to relations of power between men and women; to relations of inequality and to matters of identity and social relations that structure the lives of men and women. Gender relations are socially organized relations that differentiate males and females. While people, by and large, are born either male or female, they still have to acquire a gendered identity. One’s gender becomes part of one’s identity, one’s sense of whom one is (Elson, 1991; Anderson-Levitt, Bloch, Soumare, 1998; Kessler and McKenna, 1978, Thorne, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1993).

Gender equality means that a woman has the opportunity to enjoy good health and quality of life to the same extent a man does; that she can read, write and participate freely in the public sphere, that she has time to herself and can enjoy both dignity and self-esteem. Many of the constraints women face operate to the advantage of men (Elson, 1991; Acker, 1984; Elgvist-Saltzman, 1991; Mergarry, 1984). It is also important to note that there are different ways in which women experience gender. I share Elson’s (1991) view that even though both rich and poor women face a common danger in public places after dark, a poor woman will probably have more interest in the improvement of public transportation than a rich woman who can afford to purchase a car.

Giving females equal access to education does not necessarily mean that all other forms of inequality have been removed. People in different situations have different needs and talents. Thus, removing one form of oppression may not necessarily bring about equality. In the socialization of boys and girls in most societies, the sexes are treated differently from birth and different expectations are held up to them within the
family and in the early years of schooling. Children become aware at an early age of the culture's distinctions between masculine and feminine roles and of the culture's higher valuation of men and masculine roles. This process of socialization begins in infancy and continues throughout childhood and adolescence into adulthood. Such patterns of socialization have great consequences for learning (Elqvist-Saltzman, 1991; Acker, 1984). In most African countries, work is gendered; that is to say, some tasks are seen as "women's work" while other tasks are seen as "men's."

"Equity" means equal treatment of people even though people in different situations may have different needs or talents. Educational equity includes fairness and representation in education (Dei, 1996, 1998). Educational equality, on the other hand, refers having access of space in school settings and the sustaining of one's presence in the school (Dei, 1998). Gender inequity prevents women from acquiring certain positions that are well rewarded in society. It hampers women from forming well-defined notions of what they want and encourages them to submerge their own interests beneath those of men and children. Even in countries like Britain, Canada and the United States, where equal rights for women are encoded in the laws, women still find enormous difficulties in exercising their rights (Adams and Kruppenbach, 1986; Elson, 1991).

In Britain and North America, concerns over female under-representation in education have been expressed because of the small numbers of women in fields such as engineering, mathematics and other areas of science. In many African countries, however, women's representation in higher educational institutions is a much broader problem, in that women's participation in the educational system as a whole tends to lag behind that of men (Etta, 1994; Tembo 1984; Beoku-Betts 1998; Stromquist 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995; Conway and Bourque, 1993; Adams and
Kruppenbach, 1986). A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1991) education report observed that while significant gains had been made in the education of females in developing countries, women continue to trail behind men in their access to education.

Following independence in many African countries, large sums of money were spent on education because governments believed education was the key to modernization and development. Individuals desired education for personal advancement and the societies needed educated citizens to cope in an increasingly competitive global political economy. Girls and boys were equally represented at the primary level. However, female enrollment at the secondary and tertiary levels was less than that for males (Robertson, 1984; UN 1995; Kelly, 1989; Etta, 1994; Bloch and Vavrus 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998; Weis, 1979; 1980).

Despite the efforts of most African governments to expand, schools inequities still exist. The UNESCO 1998 education report asserts that women in Africa remain one of the “least educated” groups in the world. Current data on women’s education in Africa continue to show a persistent pattern of female gender disparity in education. For example, in the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Cameroon among others, female illiteracy is about seventy percent (UNESCO, 1998; Conway and Bourque, 1993; Njeuma, 1993).

Education of African women is an important key for improving health, nutrition and the cultural level of families and for enabling women to participate in decision making in society (Bah, 1998; Kurz and Prather, 1995; Egbo, 2000). Yet some scholars have argued that women’s access to education, by itself, has not changed their status in society. Hollos (1998), for example, argues that even with education, some women still
depend on their husbands and are not fully independent, as one would expect. Such a dependent position for women is because African societies, like many others, are patriarchal and thereby devalue and discriminate against women (Odora, 1993; Hollos, 1989). Ofei-Aboagye (1994), with reference to Ghana, argues that most Ghanaian women’s dependence on their husbands is enforced by their low level of education. Other researchers point out that access to education has indeed changed the lives of many women for the better in Africa and continue to do so. With better education, women could have or find better jobs and be able to support themselves. For example, some women in Africa now occupy responsible and high-status professional positions, no doubt made possible by their education (Browne and Barrett, 1991; Stromquist, 1990; Etta, 1994 and Egbo, 2000).

As earlier mentioned, in Africa, as in other parts of the world, women do not participate equally in formal education. In some African countries primary education is an exception rather than the norm because females tend to outnumber males. In the secondary and tertiary institutions, however, males outnumber females, in part, because more girls tend to drop out than boys do. The reasons are cultural, ideological, religious and social. Despite an increase in women’s participation in the secondary and tertiary levels of education, African women’s participation in higher education continues to lag behind that of men. One factor that is also evident is that the vast majority of women concentrate on attaining traditional female roles and “female” professions predominantly the arts and social sciences.

In order to address these issues related to gender and education in Africa, I will consider the following questions in this thesis. First, if equal opportunity allows both boys and girls to advance according to their potential and to the same standards, how can
the barriers that currently prevent African women from gaining equal access to education be overcome? How does gender inequity affect women and girls in African education? Specifically does the school curriculum encourage women to engage in certain ‘softer’ disciplines rather than in fields like engineering and the sciences? Thirdly, what processes are operating and what can be done to elicit change? Fourthly, how can educational reform contribute to African centered possibilities for national integration and social construction? Women constitute the largest group in the population and most of them live in the rural areas. The question then is what is happening to women who do not live in the cities but in the rural areas? How far has equality been achieved? What problems still remain to be solved? Is there a need for further research on women and education in Africa?

**Learning and Research Objectives**

Researchers continue to publish information about gender inequities in schooling and training programs in Africa, but this has not resulted in the eradication of inequities. In most African countries, mechanisms that would encourage girls to further their education, such as guidance and counseling, are not available to them. Only modest attempts have been made by governments to improve opportunities for women in higher education.

The learning and research objective of this thesis is to examine how researchers on African education have conceptualized gender. I will look at ten texts and examine how gender has been understood in the works and how the local subjects themselves understand gender and education. I will also look at various questions that can be asked about gender and education and see what new insights can be brought to the works.
Gender issues have challenged scholars who deal with education in Africa. When education is considered in the context of capitalist societies, feminist analyses point out that the state is responsible for inequality in education. Male domination in society, and especially in most African societies, limits their ability to comprehend the needs of women.

In the primary schools, girls tend to be equally represented with boys; some even perform better than boys do. By the time they reach secondary schools, however, females generally begin underachieving in a variety of subjects especially those that are technologically related. Girls start dropping out of school before they have sufficient education to enter highly skilled occupations and professions. Thus the female disparity becomes pronounced in higher education; compared to boys, females may not do well on exams although these same girls had done well in the primary school.

With science and mathematical subjects, studies suggest that boys perform better than girls in science possibly because girls tend to have a different attitude towards mathematics and science. It is necessary to mention that a higher performance by boys over girls in science has been found in all countries, not only in African countries (Kelly, 1984; Fägerlind and Saha, 1989).

Women in sub-Saharan Africa continue to occupy the lower levels of the social, economic and political ladder. In education, African women are underrepresented in the decision-making bodies but are strongly represented in the teaching work force, especially in the primary schools. Although the number of females in school has increased, one finds very few women in the secondary and tertiary levels of education or women who work in educational administration or participate in curriculum advisory bodies.
Given the evidence of inequality in African education, one wonders why there has not been greater public concern and demand for change. Much scholarly research and writing has been done on gender issues in African education, yet little has been done to redress the problem. African women continue to suffer inequalities that have reduced their educational and employment opportunities and hindered millions of them from achieving their full potential.

**Gender and Schooling**

Girls and women have always been at a disadvantage when it comes to education. Feminists observe that in most societies, while women are present in most social situations, they are hardly visible in state arenas (Acker, 1984; Megarry, 1984). Even where women are present and active, most social actors fail to acknowledge women's presence. Deliberate efforts have also been made to exclude women from certain areas such as politics, the science professions and executive administrative duties despite their attempts to enter such domains, especially in African countries. In general, the role of women is that of less privileged members of society and has always been subordinate to the role of men.

Schools seem to pave the way for a sexual division of labor in adulthood. In many societies, schools are organized around the notion that the genders have different needs and interests. The gender of a child provides a basis for differentiation throughout a child's school life. Children become "boys" and "girls" for registration, and queuing (Acker, 1984). This makes it difficult for females to choose non-stereotypical subject options if they wish to, or even to imagine that choices are possible beyond those usually assigned to girls or women. In African schools, men dominate the authority positions in
most fields. One exception is in the single sex female schools and in junior schools for children eight or less. It is no wonder that children assume that such arrangements are the expected shape of adult life (Acker, 1984; Elgvist-Saltzman, 1991).

Gender typing recurs in the official curriculum, teaching materials and teachers’ behavior inside and outside the classroom, the hidden curriculum of traditional assumptions and the unquestioned expectations and codes of behavior. Beoku Betts et al. (1998) illustrate how stereotypes are transmitted through unspoken assumptions which govern teacher behavior and transactions in the classroom. In most secondary and tertiary levels of schools, one witnesses the discriminatory practice of encouraging boys to do science and technical subjects whereas girls are encouraged to do subjects in the arts and the humanities (Harding and Apea, 1990). Gender provides a powerful and pervasive basis for very traditional differentiation throughout school life (Mergarry, 1984).

In most of the works reviewed, researchers report how disadvantaged African females are in education; they also offer suggestions, strategies and directions that education should take in the future to address some problems. For example, Harding and Apea (1990) suggest promoting educational opportunities for more females to become skilled in science, technology and mathematics. Even though most educated women in commonwealth African countries have qualifications in the liberal arts, this bias should not be regarded as a handicap. It is still possible for many African women to convert to science and technologically oriented careers, if they are given the appropriate conversion courses. Their broad backgrounds would enrich science and technology in development. The authors further explain that women who are already working in science are important resources because they are an inspiration for younger women at the secondary and tertiary levels of education who are about to make decisions about the future. Their
working lives and achievements can help break down the stereotypical attitudes held by teachers and parents.

There is a need for a science based curriculum for women in formal education because this would not only help women who farm to enhance production and adopt innovative methods, but would also empower women in all sectors of life (Kinyanjui, 1993). Science education for women is very important for ensuring the continued increase in food production and family welfare. Megarry (1984) has argued that the most important barrier to women's advancement is the attitudes of men and women who have accepted the status quo for too long. She argues further that if there is a worldview, man-made education can benefit from greater participation by women-as consumers, providers and decision-makers. As will be demonstrated later in this work, most of the authors whose works I discuss are female since very few men write or conduct research on the education of women. In sub-Saharan Africa, as in most other parts of the world, men overwhelmingly control the decision-making bodies in the educational systems. It would be appropriate for men to conduct research in this field so that they would join women in seeking for equality in employment and education for both genders (Megarry, 1984; Sutherland, 1984).

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is organized in six chapters. The first chapter of the thesis introduces issues of gender and difference in African education. The second chapter discusses the frameworks for my analysis. Chapter three describes the methodology and its motivations. In chapter four, the literature review covers the dilemmas of gender and how women are understood in the process of education and development within the context of
Africa. It briefly surveys literature on secondary and tertiary levels of education, among women in African countries. The fifth chapter reviews and summarizes the themes and issues that emerge from the studies and discusses my points of agreement and divergence from earlier research findings. The aim of looking at these texts is to arrive at a perspective that is more sensitive and capable of explaining experiences and effects of education. The sixth chapter, which forms the conclusion of this thesis suggests approaches that could be adopted to study gender issues in African education and the implications for rethinking schooling and education in African contexts.
Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical frameworks used for the analysis in this study. According to Connelly, Li, MacDonald, and Parpart (2000),

A theoretical framework is a system of ideas or conceptual structures that help us to see the social world, understand it, explain it and change it. A framework guides our thinking, research and action. It provides us with a systematic way of examining social issues and providing recommendations for change. (p. 53)

A framework is a perspective used to analyze a situation or the lens through which one sees a situation and its need to be examined. I use the African feminist, the anti-colonial and the indigenous knowledge framework to point out some inadequacies and limitations in the research on gender and education in Africa. These frameworks help interrogate the configurations of power arrangements embedded in ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production (Dei, 2000). This study utilizes alternative lenses to facilitate a critical understanding of possible motives for the gender disparity in African education. Basing this study on these perspectives will show the inadequacies and limitations of other explanations of why females lag behind males in African education. The theories I discuss have points of convergence and divergence. I will utilize aspects of each theory that I find helpful because I believe such an approach or a multi-perspective best captures the African human condition.

Before discussing the African feminist framework, I mention the various forms of feminism because African feminism is one of the main forms of feminism. Lindsay (1997) states that while there are myriad approaches within feminism, feminisms can be classified into four main branches: liberal, Marxist-socialist, radical and multicultural-
global feminism. For the purposes of this thesis, I will only discuss multicultural and global feminism because these are the most relevant to the African situation I analyze in this work.

**Multicultural and Global Feminism**

Not always recognized as a distinct feminist framework, multicultural and global feminism explicitly acknowledge the impact of the intersection of gender with race, class, colonization and the exploitation of women in the third world. Multicultural and global feminism is a movement of people working for change across national boundaries that are themselves expressions of patriarchy (Lindsay 1997). Global feminism contends that no woman is free until conditions that oppress women worldwide are eliminated. All the varieties of feminism deal with the link of gender with other relevant social categories. Different feminisms result when members of specific communities negotiate gender construction according to their own situations of institutionalized oppression. Feminism is not a homogeneous movement. Diversity and disagreement occur side by side with unity and consensus. Feminisms are always in a state of transition and would be modified according to the newer research and understanding that surface in academic circles as well as their experiments and experiences in transforming feminism into their daily lives (Lindsey, 1997; Naemeka, 1998).

**African Feminism**

The term “feminism” should not be taken at face value. Its meaning is often debated. It is even more difficult to generalize about African feminism. The African feminist perspective emerged to explain African gender relations. Although it is based on
certain western scholarly traditions, it tries to avoid the ethnocentric biases and conceptual errors of western feminist traditions.

The struggle against women’s oppression is not and has never been exclusive to the west although it may take different forms and focuses on different cultural, historical and class issues. In assessing gender relations in Africa, it is necessary to use a theoretical understanding grounded in subtle and detailed empirical knowledge of third world gender oppression and the understanding that this oppression is rooted in wider exploitative structures and practices.

Steady (1987) defines African feminism as “an epistemology that enables African women to theorize their racialized status in society”. As a theory, African feminism differs from other conceptual approaches to studying black women’s history:

African feminism combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than as sexual beings. It is an ideology that encompasses freedom from oppression, based on the political, economic, social and cultural manifestations of racial, cultural, sexual and class biases (Steady, 1987, p. 8).

African patterns of feminism can be seen as having developed within a context that views human life from a total rather than an exclusive perspective. It is more inclusive than other forms of feminism. This is mainly because for African women, the male is not ‘the other’; he is similar human being, a part of humanity. Each gender constitutes a critical half that makes humanity whole; neither gender is totally complete in itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own. Both male and female principles encompass life and operate jointly to maintain a cosmological balance. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) contends that African feminism is what African women do and how they do it that provides the framework for the African women’s gender-
centered awareness. Nnaemeka (1998) views it as an ideology that evokes the power of African women and tells triumphs amid obstacles of African women without underestimating the gravity of the impediments. She further argues that a major flaw of feminists’ attempts to tame and name the feminist spirit in Africa is the failure to define African feminism on its own terms rather than in the contexts of western feminism. With such contextualization African feminists argue in effect that African feminism is what western feminism is not. Nnaemeka (1998) therefore cautions against the danger of defining African feminism in relation to western feminism.

In African feminist scholarship, there is a resistance to western feminism’s inordinate and unrelenting emphasis on sexuality. African feminism also disagrees with its western counterpart over priorities. For example, in some remote villages in Africa, there is no clean water to drink; not enough food to eat and the people may never have seen a different race of humans. Such women will therefore prioritize food and water issues over the equality of the sexes. The intersections of race, class and sexual orientation in western feminist discourse does not ring with the same urgency for most African women because for them, the basic issues of everyday life intersect in many oppressive ways (Nnaemeka, 1998). Thus, African feminists argue that the western focus on ‘identity politics’ is not appropriate while women are struggling for survival. African feminism challenges men’s domination in government, economic and social institutions but it also resists the exclusion of men from women’s issues. It rather invites men as partners in problem solving and social change (Nnaemeka, 1998; Dove 1998; Steady 1987).

Many African women question feminism in the context in which it is used in western societies. Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural
imperialism and of shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class white experiences, in terms of internal racism, class and homophobia (Stamp, 1989). Secondly, the media image of the western feminist movement has often been negative portraying women as grasping individuals concerned only for their own well being and not for their family, men folk or society. These factors, as well as the false homogeneous representation of the movement by the media, have led to a great deal of hostility towards feminists. Consequently, African and other third world women have distanced themselves from western feminist goals, as they perceive them (Stamp, 1979). This hostility is often based on misunderstanding of feminists’ arguments and an ignorance of the problems which feminist movements are trying to solve; such reactions misinform or twist what feminists have to say. That is why gender inequality in education and society continues to be sustained (Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991).

African writers such as Aidoo used to contend that feminism did not apply to Africa. Hudson-Weems (1998) quotes Aidoo (1986) as saying,

Feminism. You know how we feel about that western philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African women. (p.149)

These African women argue that educated African women are adopting an ideology imported from the West to Africa “to ruin nice African women”. Many African women have rejected feminism because it aligns them with white middle-class feminists. Some African writers assert that African women in pre-colonial times enjoyed levels of status and prestige similar to those of men and engaged in a sexual division of labor based primarily on complementarity, rather than values of inferiority or superiority between women and men. Most researchers on female education agree that colonialism brought
negative consequences for women (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994; Robertson, 1984 Bloch and Vavrus 1998; Elson, 1998; Stromquist, 1998; Boserup, 1970; Aidoo 1998; Aina, 1998). They further argue that colonialism introduced new patterns in the division of labor. The strong patriarchal ideologies brought by the colonizers affected women and men. Women were denied some of their customary rights; the autonomy in decision making and the ability to travel were curtailed. In some African countries, urban employment was restricted to men and this forced women to become dependent on men for access to the cash economy (Duley and Edwards, 1986; Boserup, 1970). Such restrictions increased women’s employment in the rural areas as they became entirely responsible for the subsistent economy (Duley and Edwards, 1986). Stereotypical wifely roles imposed by the colonialists on women often still hold sway in the hidden curriculum of schools (Robertson, 1984). In some African schools, it is the girls who always spend time cleaning up the school. Since most teachers hold lower expectations for girls than for boys, they always assign girls all the housekeeping tasks around the school (Anderson-Levitt, Bloch, and Soumare, 1998; Braimah, 1980 and 1987). Other African women such as Amadiume (1987) argue that African feminist thought as an ideology, is influenced by the present and past experiences of African women. It is an acknowledgment of a long history of African women’s gendered consciousness.

Currently many African women, teachers, researchers and activists are enthusiastic to know more about issues confronting women in their daily lives. Most African women participate in international conferences and are more comfortable with feminist approaches to issues (Assibey-Mensah, 1998; Hudson-Weems, 1998; Nilüfer, Çagatay, Grown, 1986). Aidoo (1998) for instance, has taken a different stand now, referring to herself as a feminist:
When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then ... whether I am a feminist, I not only answer yes but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist – especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of feminism. (p. 47)

Western feminist theories on women, gender and development in Africa do not challenge the economic development status quo in Africa. Furthermore, most scholars who use the western feminist approaches tend to evaluate African societies in terms of Euro-American culture or from the outside in, instead of from the inside out (Dove, 1998; Hudson Weems, 1993; Mbilinyi, 1992; Terborg-Penn, 1987; Naemeka, 1998). I choose African feminism because I shall be theorizing social change and transformation from African perspectives using African lenses and tools of analysis. It is clear that there is no paradigm free from shortcomings and contradictions, and no theoretical framework is appropriate for all researchers interested in women and education in Africa. Choosing African feminism does not mean that I am blindly praising African feminism while vilifying western feminism.

I choose to use an African feminist framework because in search for gender equity, African feminism, like western feminism, makes females aware of the forces that account for women's subordination in society and holds that the situation can be remedied in part, through education. African feminism subjects indigenous cultural norms, received legal notions and new state laws to new scrutiny and helps assess whether they are in women's interests. In charting an African course, African feminism tends to generate positive changes in African political structures and contribute to greater

The African feminist framework is a perspective that leads both males and females to become “gender sensitive” and to engage in gender analyses and action to encourage both males and females to reach their full potential. It is therefore intrinsically linked to a collective action to overcome gender inequality. The African feminist perspective extends the analysis for understanding gender inequity in African education and development, and should be useful to the African state in developing policies and strategies to eradicate gender inequality. As Stromquist (1984) points out, in the final analysis it is the state that determines which collective benefits and services should be made available to individuals and groups in modern society.

**Anti-Colonial Discursive Framework**

I share the opinion of Dei and Asgharzadeh (2000) that the feminist movement cannot offer prescriptions for all gender concerns and challenges. One common thread running through various feminist narratives is the fact that patriarchy is at the core of all social formations. Patriarchy is all about control and domination. It is about imposing one’s will on others for the purpose of dominating them. Patriarchal relations are colonial relations. As such the anti-colonial approach may offer a most effective method by which to subvert patriarchal and paternalistic relations of control and domination.

This study also uses an anti-colonial theoretical framework in order to understand gender and other social issues affecting schooling in sub-Saharan Africa. I draw upon an anti-colonial analysis of the institutional structures that deliver education in the African context; these include (but are not limited to) the structures for teaching, learning and the
administration of education. Anti-colonial theory challenges all systems of patriarchy and
male domination.

There is always a temptation to interpret the term "colonial" to mean "foreign" or
"alien". "Colonial", in this context means "imposed" or "dominating". It is imposed
because it is against the will of the people who are not allowed much say in the way their
affairs are administered. The governed therefore become marginalized. Dei (1998),
Memmi, (1969) Fanon, (1963) and Foucault, (1980) argue that this approach treats
marginalized groups as subjects of their own experiences and histories. The anti-colonial
framework puts into a theoretical perspective, issues emerging from colonial and imperial
relations. It also interrogates the configurations of power embedded in ideas, cultures and
histories of knowledge production. It allows us to interrogate various relations in terms of
gender in society.

This approach also recognizes as important, locally produced knowledge arising
from cultural history and social interactions of a group of people (Dei and Asgharzadeh,
2000). One must understand knowledge from different sources and in different ways;
knowledge systems need not be the same as the formal educational system that involves
reading and writing. Such an approach to the study of African education examines both
formal and informal learning cultures through the life of a human being. It details
existing school practices, as well as social and institutional barriers to knowledge
production in the African context. The anti-colonial theoretical perspective also helps to
understand how the production of new knowledge forms about learning experiences and
social practices of marginalized communities and groups contribute to a transformation
of the educational process.
The framework acknowledges the role played by the educational system in producing (and reproducing) ethnic or gender, religious and class-based inequalities in society. The anti-colonial framework is based on the need to confront and challenge diversity and difference. Anti-colonial theory sees a compelling need for an urgent educational system that is more inclusive and which can respond to varied concerns.

The anti-colonial framework treats the marginalization of certain voices and ideas in the school system as a problem and rejects the deligitimization of the knowledge and experience of subordinate groups in the pedagogic and communicative practices of the schools. Within that discursive framework one views schools as part of an institutional structure sanctioned by society to serve the material, political and ideological interests of the state and in the economic and social formation. The anti-colonial framework suggests that any strategies designed to respond to educational change should address questions of power, knowledge and systematic inequalities and explore viable alternative forms of education for both men and women.

Anti-colonial discourse points to the relevance of using indigenous language and knowledge forms to create social understanding that draws or combines literature with politics, culture, history, economic and understandings of spirituality.

**Indigenous Knowledge Framework**

Indigenousness refers to the social norms and values, and the social and mental constructs which guide, organize and regulate a people’s way of living and making sense of the world.

The African indigenous knowledge perspective has its origin in indigenization theories in Sociology, and emphasizes that an African knowledge system has relevance
for educational pedagogy, curricular development and reforming educational equity and accessibility. The notion of indigenousness highlights the power relations and dynamics embedded in the production interrogation and collaborative dimensions of knowledge and affirms that the interpretation or analysis of social reality is subject to different and sometimes oppositional perspectives (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg, 2000).

The anti-colonial discourse works with a notion of ‘indigenousness’ which may be defined as knowledge consciousness arising locally and in association with long-term occupancy of a place (Dei, 2000). Such consciousness emerges from an awareness of the intellectual agency of local subjects and the capacity to use knowledge to challenge, rupture and resist colonial and imperial relations of domination and to resuscitate oneself from mental bondage. An Indigenous knowledge theoretical framework is appropriately discussed within an anti-colonial discursive framework. The indigenous knowledge framework embodies a critique of the wholesale denigration, disparagement and discard of tradition and culture in the name of modernity and global space.

By according a discursive integrity to subjects’ accounts of their histories and cultures, indigenous languages and knowledge-forms, colonial imperialist projects can be destabilized. Contact between the ‘imperial order’ and the ‘colonial’ periphery continues to involve complex and creative encounters or resistances. These resistances help sustain the local human conditionalities of the colonized ‘other’.

Itwaru (1999) argues that part of the imperial and colonial legacies is to see the colonized as the ‘inferiorized other’. The ‘other’ becomes the disauthenticated person, one devoid of an indigenous identity, ancestry or history. The imposed knowledge, however, is always insecure of its own existence. Consequently, it is always threatened by any oppositional order or knowledge, and will move to destroy and devalue critical
thought and action. In other words, the imposed order anticipates resistance in the indignity of the colonized and tries to destroy it.

The indigenous must be upheld as referring to those whose authority resides in origin, place, history and ancestry. It is a problem, though, how relations of dependency allow even some minority groups to seek legitimacy within eurocentric standards and measurements of their pursuance of critical discourse. Anti-colonial thought challenges this subversion of knowledge and agency.

By using an African feminist lens, anti-colonial and indigenous frameworks, I evoke a discursive framework and theorize how research on women in African education can be improved. I use this framework to question institutional power, privilege and gender inequity in African education.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This study is centred on rethinking African education based upon the issues of gender and difference. I draw mainly from theoretical and empirical studies in gender and education to consider both historical and contemporary dimensions of gender struggles in formal education in Africa. The discussion is mainly descriptive and exploratory.

Historically most African women have been living in poverty and continue to be exploited and marginalized. Gender equity in education cannot be achieved if the resources to help women fight inequity are the very ones that subordinate them. Research should be able to connect with and mobilise African women to achieve their goals in life.

There exists a substantial number of published sources for gender and development practitioners and policy makers that examine gender equity in education. I share the view of Odaga and Heneveld (1995), however that, no significant new findings have been reported in the literature since the initial studies on gender equity in African education. Yet, it is clear that there has been much work on the subject to highlight knowledge about access and participation of females in secondary and tertiary levels of education in sub-Saharan Africa. The following are some of the questions that I will consider: Why has 'gender' become so prominent in these studies? Why do many studies and development projects, including ones in education, frame their work around gender? Do they really mean women or girls when they talk of gender? What happened to 'women' as a category? Does 'gender' allow the inclusion of men? What might be the consequences of the shift from 'woman' to gender in real policies and practices? Does it lead to shifts in policy? What is meant by development? What is the social location of the authors of
these works? Are they men, women, African or western-educated? Who is funding their research? Is the research carried out as part of the policy-generation for governments or development agencies?

This thesis sets out to analyze some key research on women and education in sub-Saharan Africa. It involved a documentary analysis of a range of textual sources.


These texts are all research reports on women and education in Africa. They constitute
some of the most important work done in the field of African education, but are not discussed in any order of importance. These texts were randomly selected from a larger corpus of the best research. The method I used was to look at texts in gender and education in the light of new questions such as those summarized above. I examined the backgrounds of the authors of the texts, the contexts and how the data source was secured. I also looked at the political and academic projects of the authors.

I examined the theoretical frameworks used, the key questions investigated in each study and how these works address the questions asked in this thesis or what meanings and interpretations these works bring to these questions. I considered how male writers and female writers conceptualized the problems of gender in schools.

The aim was to highlight themes in the work of literature on women and education from the 1980s to 2000. The techniques used were a literature review and library based research. Drawing on several studies on female education in Africa, I reviewed and analyzed the social and structural barriers to women's education, the tensions and transformations that are implicit in discussions and debates about issues of gender and difference in African education. I examined how the texts dealt with themes like access equity, retention, curriculum and pedagogy, schools, rules and regulations in African Schools.

In most sub-Saharan African countries, fundamental factors appear to determine whether or not a girl has access to education (Egbo, 2000; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995, Adams and Kruppenbach, 1986). Conway and Borque (1993) raise the concern that education for the past forty years has brought remarkable expansion in women's educational access in Africa; however, girls' access has not eliminated the male bias found in western culture, which is in turn reflected in the educational systems in Africa.
patterned after the west. Educational excellence is not easily attainable nor can it be made equitable in an environment which national economic policies squeeze the masses at the same time as corporate and international capital interests are soaring. Leach (1998) has analyzed the causes and consequences of sex discrimination in education in developing countries and questioned whether existing educational institutions perpetuate the existing order or promote change. Some of the published works examine the international effort on promoting female education. They implicate factors like poverty, social conventions, early marriage and violence in schools and curricula stereotyping as the main barriers impeding or slowing the progress towards gender equity in education.

Retaining females in schools has been a very arduous task. One must consider how ethnicity, social class and rural urban factors interact to predict female responses to school (Kelly and Elliot, 1982). This is normally in the form of attendance, retention rates in school, acceptance of school-legitimated knowledge or the uses to which women who get an education put their schooling despite the disparities in the society as a whole. There is a need, as already stated to integrate women into areas like mathematics, science and technology; since science and technology shape our futures and are essential to development and there is a need to retain women in these areas (Harding and Apea, 1990).

A school’s curriculum reflects the values, biases, prejudices and divisions of society. Those in power select knowledge that the curriculum will use. In most societies men construct knowledge for men and women. This enables them to privilege certain groups in society over others. Policy makers in Africa have supported a curriculum that requires boys and girls to study different subjects.
This thesis looks at how the authors discuss curriculum in most African schools. The curriculum in most schools in sub-Saharan Africa reinforces class, national, ethnic and gender differences. The curriculum is of a low level, inferior in qualitative and quantitative terms for both men and women at any level (Mbilibi, 1998). Sex bias in the formal school curriculum is reflected in the text, facilities, teachers and administration. Most of the research sees the need for major reforms in the content of the curriculum (Leach, 1998; Conway and Borque, 1993).

Most of the selected authors examine educational opportunities and constraints for women in various parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Bloch, Beoku-Betts and Tabahnik, 1998; Stromquist, 1998; Odaga and Heneveld 1995; Kelly and Elliot, 1982; Conway and Borque, 1993; Egbo, 2000). They hold different theoretical perspectives and make significant contributions to how education affects women in sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the authors see that there is value for schooling for females in Africa and try to provide insight into many of the processes and possible negative outcomes of schooling for girls.

A rule is a law or custom that guides or controls behaviour or action. It represents a decision usually made by an organisation about what must or must not be done. Rules and regulations are needed to ensure the smooth running of the school. Yet rules and regulations in African education have not been fair to females.

As indicated earlier, although there is a substantial amount of scholarly research on gender-related issues in education in sub-Saharan Africa, I share the view with Beoku-Betts (1998) that available data is sometimes aggregated or inconsistent. Case studies are few and far between and where they exist, they are likely based on poor record keeping. Such problems make comparisons and generalizations difficult; however broad tentative conclusions are drawn from subsequent analysis and discussions.
For most of the texts I used, the researches are conducted in western countries. Only a few of the writers such as Harding and Apea, (1990) and Egbo, (2000) had their research conducted in Africa: it is in the West that social scientists have been able because of funding, to explore both the advantage and disadvantages of formal schooling. Such funding, as noted elsewhere in this thesis, can produce bias in research because investigators use a western paradigm to judge an African situation although they often claim to be using dual perspectives.

Given the considerable variation within and between African countries and in order to avoid generalizations, a few African countries representing the World Bank classification levels of economic development were selected for analysis: Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Senegal, Cameroon and Sierra Leone. General trends for Africa as a whole were used as baselines for my comparison.

I rely upon a few surveys reported in the last ten years and made references to some situations in specific countries, mainly east, west and central Africa. This choice was not because they were representative or unusual, but data about these countries are more readily available. I will situate the analysis in secondary and tertiary level of education because the framework for promoting gender equality in the educational system is largely defined and institutionalized from the secondary level in Africa.

It is worth noting some observations on the nature and character of the data from which conclusions will be drawn. The texts I have chosen are from writers with various backgrounds. Some are feminists, development workers and researchers. Many non-African scholars have also contributed in this area. Hence they may not express what African females really lack. I believe generally that ‘insiders’ (an African woman who has gone through a similar experience in Africa) will bring deeper insights into the issues
than non-Africans would to the situation. Most of the writers are Africans, a matter which is particularly important because as African writers, they are likely to bring deep insights into the issues on gender and education in Africa much better than non-African writers writing on the topic.

This thesis will touch on the perpetuation of similar power relations and structures of exploitation and domination that are intrinsic to neo-colonialism. This thesis considers whether if the education of women in sub-Saharan Africa serves as an indicator of the progressive nature of the ongoing development process. I problematize the notion of "education for development." It is normally assumed that with development, women will always have equal and adequate education. Yet I question whether it should simply be assumed that there necessarily exists a positive correlation between the two.

I hope the present analysis and research will also contribute to knowledge about the factors that influence or deter female education in Africa. I also desire that it leads to better approaches to studying issues of gender in African education and equitable schooling experiences and outcomes for men and women in Africa.
Chapter Four

An Overview of Female Education in Sub-Saharan Africa - A Literature Review

Until recently, writers on African education paid little attention to issues of gender. Currently, a large number of texts, articles, pamphlets, books and reports are available about women, gender issues and education in Africa. A famous African proverb by Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey reads, “To educate a man is to educate an individual but to educate a woman is to educate a nation.” It is also the motto of Adehye Hall, a female hall of residence at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The proverb captures the essence and the need to educate women. Yet a cursory glance at the gender ratios of students and academic staff in African institutions of higher learning reveals the stark imbalance that favors men against women (see Table 1). For example, in countries like Chad, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroun and Tanzania women make up less than ten per cent of the student population of tertiary institutions (Hyde, 1989; 1991; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998). In 1990 women accounted for only 21 percent of total university level enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa. This is the lowest percentage for women’s participation in higher education in any region of the world (Beoku-Betts, 1998; UNESCO, 1995).
### Table 1

**Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio, 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Rate for Women</th>
<th>Gender Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroun</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the colonial era, education was extended mainly to males and males were given higher priority than females. Female ratios were low at the primary level and steadily declined in most colonies, as students advanced upward through the educational pyramid. Generally women in Africa entered the secondary and tertiary levels of education rather late. In most sub-Saharan African countries, only very few secondary and high schools were opened in the 1960s and 1970s, and a vocational curriculum was imposed on the majority of female students.

Even after independence, most sub-Saharan African countries have struggled with an inherited colonial educational system that has failed to meet the needs of a largely rural population. In an attempt to remedy this situation, international organizations have tried to implement strategies to help modify educational institutions in Africa to meet the needs of the local people. The impact of the programs has rather been problematic. This
is because organizations like the United Nations International Children Educational Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Projects (UNDP) neglect social, political, and cultural factors that will usually affect the process of change. Education and training in Africa have been mainly donor driven and do not help to alleviate the gender gap.

The few women who pursued secondary and tertiary education were encouraged to study literary courses in English literature or to prepare for occupations like nursing, teaching, clerical services and lower administrative services. Regional and gender disparities remained even at the height of public support for education. In spite of African governments' commitment to universal adult education, large proportions of women remained illiterate in some regions. In the early 1980s, however, the proportion of women in secondary and university education rose slightly (Weis, 1979; 1980).

Sex differentiation and discrimination continued in the curriculum, especially at post primary levels of schooling. The majority of women were either discouraged or did not consider themselves competent to study science at the post-secondary level (Harding and Apea, 1990; Mbilinyi, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998). They found themselves taking courses such as home economics and vocational training. I share Mbilinyi’s (1991) view that in most African countries, the hierarchical ordering of knowledge, with its differential valuation of different kinds of subject matter and its activities has remained intact. These structures help to sustain class and gender ideologies that maintain the status quo.

Research shows that girls seeking education in most African countries face many social, cultural, and economic obstacles compared to boys, although the nature and the
disparity may vary from one African country to another. There is overwhelming evidence in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and the Ivory Coast, Botswana, Namibia and Cameroon that the enrolment of girls at the primary school level exceeds that of boys; however, female enrolment is lower than males in secondary schools. (Elliot, 1987; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; U. N. 1995). The United Nations 1991 report on education stated that girls' enrollment rates in secondary schools are lower for girls than boys in fifty-seven African countries (UNESCO, 1991). In Africa, 64% of the women in Africa are illiterate, compared to 40% of the male population (UNESCO, 1990).

Secondly, girls are under represented in the crucial fields of study such as the sciences, mathematics and technology (see Table 2), and these are some of the areas that are critical to their participation in their societies (Njeuma, 1993; Beoku-Betts, 1998). At the secondary level, more girls drop out of school than boys and as a result are not able to graduate or get the certification they need to find a job (Njeuma, 1993; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Apt, 1998; Kurz and Prather, 1995; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rate for Women (%)</th>
<th>Gender Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroun</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The economic, political, ideological and cultural challenge in Africa has had an extremely detrimental impact on education and has indirectly affected the educational system; it has become difficult for governments to transform the educational systems in their respective countries (Mbilinyi, 1998). The ever decreasing prices of primary export products of many African countries (e.g. tea, cocoa, tin) most of which serve as raw materials in the western world, has led to dwindling financial resources at the disposal of African countries. As a result, the amount of resources that can be invested in education is constantly decreasing.

Secondly, due to the poverty levels in many African countries, they have had to rely on external sources for loans and other forms of aid to finance their budgets and other development projects. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) through structural adjustment programs (SAP) has imposed harsh conditions as a prerequisite for financial support. Other donors like the World Bank have not behaved differently; African governments have to submit to their programs before being provided with credits or other forms of loans. These policies result in the economies of many African countries being destabilized and their national sovereignty undermined.

Furthermore, since independence, many Africans have experienced violent political upheavals. In most African countries, the military have intervened in the political system at one time or another. In order to consolidate their power, most of these military governments spend a vast amount of the nations’ resources on arms. Another common trend is that when one government comes into power, it totally abandons whatever plans the previous government had put in place. The political instability in these countries also leads to strikes and university closures. These events make it unsafe,
especially for women, to proceed with studies in the university. The educational system suffers in the process since scarce resources are diverted to other areas.

Over the past several years, the attention toward the role of education, training and schooling for children and adults throughout the world has emerged as a result of many influences that include development theories (Adams and Bjork, 1969; Lewis, 1986; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Stomquist, 1998; Oluwole, 1994; Scott, 1995). The discussion of some of the problems faced by African women in education will therefore not be complete without a discussion of some of the development theories and how they affect education in Africa.

When terms such as “education” and “gender” are linked discursively to sub-Saharan Africa, it often suggests a need for the development of the individual woman and her society. Bloch and Vavrus (1998) citing Escobar (1984 - 85) has defined development as “a series of political technologies intended to manage and give shape to the reality of the third world” (p. 384). Development is a kind of social change in which the wealth and income of a society markedly increases (Adams and Bjork 1969). It provides a scale that is used to rank countries as “developed”, “developing” or “underdeveloped”, using various indicators or indices. Developed countries provide the yardstick by which all other countries are ranked, and the assumption is that all countries should aspire to be like developed countries (Jain, 1993). Yet what have developed countries achieved? They have achieved mass mechanization and industrialization, high levels of production of goods, an employer-employee relationship in all kinds of work, and high-energy consumption. These are forms of economic growth and represent only one meaning of development. Some indigenous African scholars such as Dei (1993) assert that many conventional views of development in western social thought have
nothing or little to do with illuminating the lives of “developing” societies on whose account development have allegedly been formulated. Development has come to mean different things to different people over the years; those whom development was meant to benefit have not seen eye-to-eye with the experts. Despite the good intentions of the development experts as reflected in what they may mean by development, there has been a departure from the views of the people who it was meant to benefit. Consequently many indigenous African scholars remain skeptical about development programs in Africa.

According to Jain (1993), an alternative form of development would be in the growth of people's capacities and strengths, of their public involvement and their self-reliance and of their equal status. Yet development ordinarily, is equated with economic growth and consequently with mass industrialization. However, this kind of development has not helped the countries in Africa as they are supposed to because development should be measured in terms of social change and less emphasis placed on industrialization. Authors such as Ingham (1993) view development as a process and not a goal. They claim that the failure of nations to see development from this angle explains why those countries encounter difficulties in designing consistent and effective economic policies.

Development theories emerged at the end of the Second World War and were used to explain the “underdevelopment” of the “Third world”. It was believed that education and industrialization could help poor countries to modernize. There are two main competing theories, Modernization and Dependency. Even though these two are distinct, they are connected in many ways. The two theories see education as a tool that provides the skills necessary for change (Adams and Bjork, 1969; Fagerlind and Saha, 1989).
According to the modernization theory, people in developing or third world countries need training in the basics of social, economic and political issues. The modernization theory also assumes that through the development process, many of the third world's social and economic problems will be solved. Schooling and other training programs are believed to develop the minds and bodies of those developing countries to work in modernized industries. (Bloch and Vavrus 1998, Schultz, 1961). This paradigm operates on the functionalist assumption that education, especially formal schooling, serves to maintain harmonious social relations and to direct social change in a positive direction.

Modernization theory does not critique capitalism because its objective is to use schooling as a means of creating effective and efficient skilled workers for a market economy. Stromquist (1998) contends that, in the modernization theory, education is treated as a resource open equally to everyone; yet family influences and personal characteristics determine differences in the types and levels of education people attain. Researchers operating in this paradigm recognize that school practices play a role in maintaining social inequalities, but such inequalities are held to be the result of not taking sufficient account of children's initial differences in the way schools equalize opportunities (Scott, 1995; Oluwole, 1997).

Closely related to the modernization theory is the human capital theory which postulates that the most efficient path to the national development of any society lies in the improvement of its population, that is, its human capital (Fägerlind and Saha, 1989). It argues that investment in a person's own education brings both personal and social benefits. Schultz (1961) argues that education is not to be viewed simply as a form of consumption but rather as a productive investment. Education does not only improves the
individual choices available to people, but an educated population provides the type of labor force that is necessary for industrial development and economic growth.

Like modernization theory, the human capital theory provides a basic justification for large public expenditure on education in both developed and developing nations. Modernization and human capital theories attribute the sources of underdevelopment to factors within countries rather than factors outside the countries. The appeal of these theories was based upon the presumed economic return of investment in education both at the macro and micro levels. Politicians and decision-makers made efforts to promote investment in human capital because it would result in rapid economic growth for their societies (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989). The human capital investment, on the other hand, provided returns in the form of economic success and achievement for individuals. "Woman power" versions of human capital theory usually encourage the education of women. The theory further argues that a society must be educated to keep pace with its competitors by investing in brilliant men and women in the society. Yet such an argument is double-edged and elitist and can easily be turned about to rationalize less investment in female education in times of labour over-supply Acker (1984). If society focuses on academically talented individuals, what will happen to women (and men) who are less talented (academically) or poor and cannot afford an education? The theory does not address this issue.

Criticisms have been leveled against the human capital theory. Fagerlind and Saha (1989) argue that it is quite controversial as to the extent to which education or other forms of human investments are directly related to improvements in income or occupations. In fact, it is now accepted that raising the level of education in society, under certain circumstances at least, can increase inequalities in income distribution.
Such inequalities may result from the way education is financed and the way it is distributed in its facilities (Blaug, 1985). The human capital approach has lost much of its appeal in recent years because expanding schools have not necessarily increased opportunities for women (Smock, 1981; Fagerlind and Saha, 1989).

In recent years, although considerable progress has been made in educating females in Africa, this has been at a considerable cost because about a quarter of the national budget is allocated to education, to the detriment of other sectors of the economy. In countries like Cameroon, the state invested up to one-fifth of its budget in education. Primary schools have been built everywhere even in remote villages. Secondary schools have been built in every region. There has been an attempt to bring schools nearer to children (Fagerlind and Saha 1989).

Despite investments made by African states in the field of education the results fall short of expectations. A number of reports show that the percentage of children attending school in Africa is low compared to that of other continents; the percentage of school dropout is extremely high and only few have access to secondary and tertiary education (Kelly and Elliot, 1982; Adams and Kruppenbach, 1985; Leach 1998; Odaga and Heneveld 1995; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998; Conway and Borque, 1993; Njeuma, 1993). The failure of the educational systems to take up the development challenges resulted in the tendency to question modernization and human capital theories; education as a force and a change and promoter of development cannot take place in isolation. There is the need for an approach that will take account of relationships with other areas such as the personal, cultural, social, economic and political aspects of the African society (Bluag, 1985; Dei, 1993; 1998; Etta, 1994; Stromquist, 1998;).
One of the main features of dependency theory is the attention it pays to the role of the state in maintaining capitalist relations through education, especially through schools (Fägerlind and Saha; 1989). Dependency theorists examine the role of the state in creating and maintaining capitalism and see education as an institution that helps to reproduce class differences in the service of capitalism. They also consider poverty in the “Third world” to be a function of the dependency of developing countries on the market economies of the first world; they seek to explain how a totalizing system like capitalism operates to oppress certain actors in the schools and the economy, and how capitalism challenges dominant relations of power by transforming economic structures empowering individuals and oppressed groups and uncovering hegemonic relationships and knowledge systems. Yet dependency theory, like the modernization theory, has failed to take adequate account of women’s positions in economic and social relations, and of the mechanisms of control through education by international agencies and vestigial colonial and post-colonial socioeconomic relations (Stromquist 1998; Bloch and Varus 1998; Leach, 1998). There is a wide range of issues such as a re-examination of the relationship between income and power within and outside the home that these theories must address.

I share the opinion of Boserup, (1970) that “development” in Africa has denied women equal access to formal education and has undermined their contribution to the political and economic arenas of their countries. Many projects have been financed by the IMF and the World Bank ostensibly to benefit or improve the lives of women or certain segments of society on the continent. While there is nothing wrong with this, the stated aims and objectives of these projects are very ambitious and sometimes pure rhetoric. What almost always happens is that the people for whom the projects are meant do not benefit from them. The reports of the projects only include information that the sponsors
want to hear. We cannot totally absolve Africans from the crisis in education. Many African leaders, administrators and educational policy makers have done little to change flawed educational policies and practices inherited from the colonialists (Dei, 1998).

The educational development strategies imposed by western economies have had some negative effects on Africa. The question arises whether development in access to education fosters female independence or perpetuates dependency upon the international donors who provide many of the resources for expanding schooling.

**Development and Education**

In developing countries, both men and women can become "victims of development", and "modernization" seems to benefit males far more than females. Development requires good governments that give men and women equal voices and equal access to education. Including women in the African development process is vital; they seem to have been largely left out, but equitable development cannot occur if women continue to be excluded from affairs in their own societies. As a result of the under-representation of females in schools, women experience difficulty in obtaining better employment and very few get the opportunity to contribute toward the social, political and economic affairs of their communities. It is therefore necessary to fully integrate women into the development of any society in which they live.

Various studies on the socioeconomic transformation of African countries have reported the economic marginality, relative impoverishment and subordination of rural women. (Robertson, 1976; Kaunda, 1990; Elabor-Idemudia, 1991; 1993). Women have benefited very little from the development process as men accumulate the greater share of society's available productive resources. Although this is still the case for most societies,
Dei (1994) notes that some rural women are taking advantage of new economic opportunities presented by processes of change to improve upon their living conditions. In a study conducted in a Ghanaian town called Ayirebi, he observed that women’s economic power and social position go beyond the stereotypes formed about African women. Despite the economic difficulties in the 1990s, women played an active role in the revival of the local economy. They invested their energies, not only in securing new access to productive resources, but also in expanding their productive activities.

Women in the rural areas have been able to define their own needs and institute their own strategies and responses to national economic contraction and expansion. Women have conceptualized development in the sense of belonging to a community and connecting with other people in a way which makes it possible for them to satisfy their mutual interests. To them, development means utilizing local creativity and resourcefulness to respond to harsh economic realities and to sustain basic livelihoods (Dei, 1994).

Yet such findings should not obscure the main point that throughout the history of most sub-Saharan African countries, women’s issues and concerns have been generally been relegated to the background in the overall national development plan (Dei, 1998, citing Awusabo-Asare, 1990). Many African countries do not see gender relations as central to the organization of domestic production. Some national organizations try to mobilize women for national reconstruction, that these organizations are not autonomous and are therefore not able to withstand the challenges of political instability (Mikkel (1989). In other words, with any change in government, these organizations are either dissolved or integrated into other larger organizations, rendering them powerless.

The state’s version of national development has not helped rural women to
articulate their daily experiences to the outside world. There has been a failure to recognize that rural women not only theorize in their communities as part of their daily lives, but also articulate and interpret their experiences. Many development programs have continually undermined local women's abilities to control their own lives and made them objects of exploitative economic systems. Development experts not only have to get local peoples involved in the development process, but they have to learn, from rural peoples, the problems development brings and how all parties can work together to find appropriate solutions.

In the 1990s, UNICEF made attempts to reduce gender disparity in education in Africa (UNICEF, 1991). It drew the attention of African governments to the plights of women on the continent and encouraged governments to address the education of females as a priority. At the fourth United Nations conference on women at Beijing in 1995, commitments were made to ensure universal education and close the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2005 (UN 1995). This is only a remote possibility. Since the beginning of the decade, the situation has actually worsened in some regions. Since 1992, in the sub-Sahara, the number of children of primary school age not enrolled in schools has risen by two million to thirty-nine million. Two-thirds of these are girls and the gender disparity continues to widen despite international commitments to close the gender gap within the first three years of this century (Sweetman, 1998). The Organization of African Unity (OAU) also declared 1996 as the year of education in Africa. I believe girls' and women's education is a challenge that the continent should take up.

In Africa, government action with respect to educational issues is often delayed and lame. In many sub-Saharan African countries, national policies on women are still in
the form of draft documents. In 1993, forty-one countries were represented at the Pan
African conference on the education of girls, where a consensus was reached to address
the education of girls and females as a priority in Africa. Since then, government policies
have done little to encourage female participation in education and access to equal
opportunity (Etta, 1994). Consequently the emerging picture suggests a great deal of
stated policy and government rhetoric which is at variance with actual policy
implementation within individual countries. In addition, political instability, perpetual
economic problems and the lack of political will among men and ruling groups make it
difficult for governments to maintain the commitment to changing the status of women.

In some African countries, women’s attempt to organize has been met with
political skepticism and hostility but that is nonetheless a crucial part of change (Mikell
1992). In Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Cameroon, the aim of incorporating women on an
equal basis with men into roles such as development planning, as decision makers and
administrators, has been a recurrent theme of national and international meetings for
more than a decade. This theme was emphasized by country delegations at the 1985
World Conference to “Appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women:
Equality, Development and Peace” held in Nairobi. In Ghana, the National Council for
Women and Development (NCWD) was formed in the early 1970s to promote awareness
and advancement of women’s issues; it serves as the umbrella organization for the small
social organizations to which many Ghanaian women belong. Specifically, the council,
on its formation, was charged with the responsibilities to train rural women in alternate
ways of producing household needs using local available materials and to promote
literary programs in the rural areas. The Council’s aim is to continue to rally women for
change (Dolphyne, 1987; Mikell, 1992 and Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Women in Nigeria
(WIN) is another organization that rallies women for change. WIN has been involved with national matters while paying particular attention to women’s concerns. Its holistic perspective enables it to accommodate anyone who is interested in agenda that ensures equitable treatment of women and WIN has contributed immensely to the conscientization of women and men in modern Nigeria. Many of the issues it addressed such as education, rural development and political representation of women have received some attention from the government and its official agencies (Amaduame, 1987; Aina, 1998; Iwerebor, 1998; Nnaemeka, 1998).

**Feminism and Education**

Feminist critiques have analyzed the continuing subjugation of women because of their class in society. Many feminists are critical of capitalism and the influence of capitalist countries as agents on African countries. Socialist feminist theory emphasizes how patriarchal, as well class relations subjugate men and women differently and interactively. Feminists argue for a better education for girls because a disadvantage at school affects one’s place in the labor market as well.

North American feminist scholars (Acker, 1994; 1995; Gaskell, 1983; 1992) looked at women’s participation in schooling at different levels and in different disciplines in the United States. Their analysis went beyond enrollment issues. They questioned the notion that the only problem facing women is that of access to schooling and instead concentrated on examining processes within schools and classrooms. In this way feminists have been able to show how the dynamics of teacher-student interaction, the messages and images in textbooks, and several aspects of the “hidden curricula” produce a negative and cumulative impact on the development of women’s social
identities (Anderson-Levitt, Bloch and Soumare, 1998; Stromquist, 1998). Some feminists have also analyzed how the state does not always act on relevant information with respect to gender. Legislation (on female equity) passed is not always enforced or properly funded. Even though our understanding of gender continues to grow, there is skepticism about the power of information to change the world and increased awareness of how economic and ideological forces support each other to create the chronic disadvantage of women (Gaskell, McLaren and Novogrodsky, 1989; Gaskell and McLaren, 1987; O’Brien, 1983; Stromquist, 1998).

Feminists also argue that there is also the tension between widespread practices of discrimination and the myth that all persons are treated equally, especially in the classroom. Society assumes that classrooms are places where girls and boys are treated equally; many teachers also believe they are sensitive to gender equality. Yet the hidden curriculum, both formal and informal, reinforces the salience of gender, the significance of gender difference and the devaluation of women. Many studies (e.g. Anderson-Levitt, Bloch and Soumare, 1998; Thorne, 1993) demonstrate that classroom dynamics between teachers and students and between students favor boys most of the time. Overwhelming evidence suggests that discriminatory practices coexist with the proclaimed ideal of opportunity, and that students implicitly recognize and accept differential treatment on the basis of gender.

**Contemporary Situation**

The current call for more education for women and girls in Africa comes from both international and local communities, although what form that education should take is often contested. Since independence, in most African countries there has been a
parallel shift in attention by international donors and governments towards the provision of basic education as a principle of economic and political development. Paramount among these are the promotion of child and adult literacy, making primary schooling universally accessible and increasing the availability of secondary and tertiary education as strategies of development.

Information about gender inequities in economic development training programs and in schooling has been available for some time. However, it is only in the past decade that international donors and the majority of governments in Africa have paid attention to reports on gender equity in education and schooling as an important focus for “efficient development” (Bloc and Vavrus, 1998; Boserup, 1970).

The effects of structural adjustment programs and the economic crises appear to have reversed the educational gains of earlier decades. Inspired by the international financial community, major reforms have been carried out and continue to be pursued by many African countries with the aim of cutting down national budgets and improving credit-worthiness. Under the educational sector adjustment program, the goal was to release more resources to improve both access and quality of education. Increasing access to basic education is not always a simple task and structural adjustment programs have sapped budgets set aside to support social services, including schools. Dei (1993) has reported the impact structural adjustment programs are having on education in Ghana. In many sub-Saharan African countries, structural adjustment programs are affecting the local people who are already “reeling” from the effects of severe national economic conditions. Citing Thakur (1991) and Kwapong (1992), he enumerates some of the educational problems in the post independence era in sub-Saharan Africa. Among these are stagnating school enrollments and declining quality of education, due to lack of
textbooks, instructional materials and other factors; the poor quality of teacher training, contracting educational finances and the inefficiency of the educational administration and management practices. There have been problems of accessibility because of high cost, shortage of qualified teachers and unbearable economic conditions for many people. Structural adjustment programs have increased educational inequities; such developments dampen the enthusiasm for pursuing education. Consequently, access and achievement are likely to widen the growing disadvantage of females in a large number of African states.

Women in sub-Saharan Africa continue to experience great difficulty in obtaining employment. It appears that the school curriculum prepares female students for certain specific roles in the society, where the social and economic rewards available for achievement are lower than for males (Gaskell, 1992; Weis, 1979). Although there is some variation among African countries, gender inequity is persistent at all levels of formal school systems (Etta, 1994; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Boateng, 1994; Stromquist, 1998; Njeuma, 1993; Conway and Borque, 1993, Mbinlinyi, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998).

As researchers like Weis (1979), Fägerlind and Saha (1989) argue, increased access to schooling for girls is necessary but does not mean increased "life chances" or opportunities for women in African society. Getting more girls or women into schools by itself is not sufficient to promote further social and economic development. With references to Ghana, Weis (1979) argues that between 1961-1974, many females had access to education but recent data suggest that girls have been admitted to low status institutions and are experiencing greater difficulty in obtaining employment. The content of education is different for girls and boys; these differences are historically rooted and tied to envisioned gender roles in the different sectors in the economy. Educational
institutions, which are supposed to be serving a democratization function for females relative to males, may in the long run ensure gender-based inequality (Weis, 1979; Fagerlind and Saha, 1989).

Among the developing countries, most African countries are classified low on the UNESCO basic education index (UNESCO, 1993) which employs five indicators including the male or female disparity to determine their relative positions on a scale of basic educational provision. The contemporary situation in Africa is that there is still a great disparity in gender, inequity of access, survival and performance at all levels of education. There is a great deal of difficulty measured in terms of completion and attainment levels of females and the feminization of certain fields of study at the tertiary levels.

**Factors Influencing Female Education in Sub-Saharan Africa**

At this juncture, I want to highlight some of the factors that influence female access to education in most African societies. The decision to send a girl to school is influenced by a number of social, cultural, ideological and economic factors. Some of the factors also relate to institutional policies and practices. In most sub-Saharan African countries, providing schooling is seen as of secondary importance to bearing children and as a result is accommodated only if circumstances permit (Oféi-Aboagye, 1994; Yeboah, 1997; Kurz and Prather, 1995; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995).

National and international education initiatives have dramatically increased educational opportunities for girls, but there is still the need for their labor at home. Primary school attendance and completion are critical during the school age years. Unfortunately this is the time that most African girls assume domestic responsibilities
and are more likely to work outside the home to help their mothers with income generating activities than boys are (Kurz and Pratner, 1995; Egbo, 2000). The economic loss to the family when girls are not working and their expected roles during their school age, adolescent and adult years often work counter to any initiatives to increase girls' participation in schooling (Kurz and Pratner 1995). Some parents who are illiterate and of low economic status, also see it as normal and acceptable to withdraw girls from school in order to rely upon their labour at home or on the farm. Some females are also made responsible for their younger siblings at a very tender age so that their parents can work to make ends meet. Females become vulnerable to social and domestic pressures after the years of compulsory education. Secondary institutions are often inflexible in their organization; a large number of females drop out of school because they find it difficult to combine school attendance with major domestic responsibilities (Kurz and Prather, 1995; Njeuma, 1993).

In-school factors, such as a limited number of female teachers and irrelevant or biased curricula, contribute to high drop out rates for girls at the primary and secondary school level. In such situations the curriculum is seen as irrelevant in the sense that girls may eventually end up marrying and so many may not "need" what they study in school. Traditional values in African society have been very disempowering to women, and we have to critically interrogate some of the systems of thought and investigate why women in traditional African society behave in certain ways. In most African countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Liberia and Cameron for instance, traditional values and cultural practices and beliefs are represented as having been drawn and passed down by the ancestors. I share the view with Ofei-Aboagye (1994), that though there is diversity, one pattern that runs is the male centered-thought process that permeates African culture.
Most Africans may not want to change things that go against what they have been taught and given by their forefathers through oral tradition, folklore and proverbs. Further media support of traditional roles and stereotypes often leaves girls less experience and confidence in their abilities to be valuable contributors to their families and society.

Tradition, however, is not constant or homogeneous. Cultural values are not frozen in time and space; traditions of the past influence the present. Contemporary events and the influence of different cultures have had far reaching implications for social and educational change (Dei 1998). In Africa, there have been dynamic social movements and social transformations going on all the time. Neither the societies nor the cultures are static, contrary to what European scholarship have made many people believe (Amadiume, 1997; Dei, 1998).

In countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, some girls (some as young as ten years old) are betrothed in marriage and taken out of school to ensure their “protection” and to prepare them for the event. This practice is usually common in Muslim communities. Others leave their families to live with the family of the betrothed until they are of a marriageable age. There are only few instances when such girls get the opportunity to further their education. Stromquist (1989) cites a study from Kenya that found that girls were made to repeat grades in school so that they were “educated enough” to find a husband. In such instances, the education of girls is seen as worthy of consideration only up to a marriageable level. There have also been references to dropouts in Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, Sierra-Leone and Ghana that indicate that female students withdrew from school when they discovered that education was conflicting with marriage.
Other factors that affect the education of some African women are cultural practices such as bride wealth, in the form of livestock or cash. Bride wealth arguably, helps girls to increase their education but only up to a certain level. The groom pays a dowry for the bride. In Zimbabwe, Sierra-Leone and among some Akan groups in Ghana, girls with higher education command higher dowries. In contrast, bride wealth among poor families encourages the father of a bride to marry off his daughter at an early age in order to collect money that enables the males in the family to marry and to bring in women to help with the household “production.”

Besides illiteracy and cultural practices, religion also plays a role in constraining female formal education in sub-Saharan Africa. There is a noticeable low presence of Muslim girls in both primary and secondary levels of education, which is further reflected at the tertiary level. Even though Christianity and Islam coexist in Africa, one finds a greater participation in education by female Christians than their Muslim counterparts (Smock, 1981; Boserup, 1970). At most African universities, the majority of females are of Christian background. There are only a few Muslim females, whose parents are either highly educated themselves or cognisant of the need to give their daughters good education. Bowman and Andersen (1982) argue, however, that the socioeconomic condition of the family or the country as a whole is more important than the religious condition. For example, with respect to the Sudan and Northern Nigeria, girls do not participate in education as a result of the conflict between western and Muslim schooling rather than of a situation that is inherent in any confrontation between conservative and radical functions of education. They argue further that women have not participated in education in some African countries because poverty is endemic. It may be poverty more than anything else, which discourages most Muslim females from schooling.
In Africa, parents who have low occupational aspirations for their daughters see education as "risky" for women because it "spoils" them. Some of the elderly believe that education does not make women good mothers because educated women tend not to work as hard for their families as they "should" and the education they receive is not related to the tasks of being a wife and a mother. It is also believed that such women tend not to 'respect' their traditions, parents or husbands. Thus many parents do not pay attention to the educational needs of their daughters. For instance, most women in Ghana remain economically active, the sectors in which they participate most heavily do not require much education and are not well paid. Women are trained to accept "female" occupations and rarely suppose that anything can be done to change their lifestyles. Hence they are likely to seek to change their circumstances.

The majority of women in Africa live in rural areas, and they constitute the largest sector of the population. Most African households are patriarchal and in many parts of Africa, polygamy is practiced. Some women in polygamous families tend to carry the job of caring and providing for their children all alone, although their husbands may be physically present. Another factor, which leaves women having to look after themselves or provide for their families, is the migration of men from rural to urban areas or neighboring countries. With industrialization, men moved to the urban areas in search of work, and some have even migrated to other countries in search of better and well paid employment. Thus rural women come to engage primarily in production of food; in most African countries, women continue to perform the bulk of agricultural labor without concomitant remuneration or recognition (Mikell, 1995).

Although it is not claimed that the conditions of African women were perfect before colonialism, they actually went from bad to worse and the effects are still evident today (Oluwole, 1997). Scott (1995), citing Boserups (1970), shows how she explored the effect of colonialism on women’s status. She notes that the colonial officials created a division of labor between men and women in the growing of cash crops.

…it is the men who do the modern things. They handle industrial inputs while women perform the degrading manual jobs; men often have the task of spreading fertilizer in the field while women spread manure; men ride the bicycles and lorries while women carry head loads as did their grandmothers. In short, men represent modern farming in the village; women represent the old drudgery. (Boserup in Scott, 1995, p. 123)

After the farm work is done, it is the female who carries the farm load or firewood (sometimes with a child on her back) and the men only carry the cutlasses as they lead the way home. When they get home all the man does is relax while the female has to cook, feed, and wash the children. By the time she is done with all these chores, there will be no time or energy left to do anything.

In her research on women’s life chances in sub-Saharan Africa, Egbo (2000) has reported that generally most women work up to about eighteen hours a day. A typical day may begin at four or five in the morning, and these hours are spent on arduous tasks such as labor intensive work on the farm, domestic work and processing or conservation of food. Such daily activities leave them exhausted, with little or no time for leisure or educational pursuits. As Tamale and Olaka-Onyango (1997) observe, these obstacles are compounded by patriarchal structures of power which not only place greater value on boys’ education than that of girls, but also discriminate against women in all spheres of social life.
Education conditions in Africa are embedded in political, economic and ideological contexts. Adding to the cultural and ideological factors discussed is the ineptitude of postcolonial governments. Since independence, the political scene in many African countries has been dominated by a military elite that does not seem to place much value on education. Much of the scarce resources in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone have been diverted to military supplies and equipment to help military governments maintain their hold on power. One therefore finds teachers at all levels (from primary school to the university) being among the lowest paid in the country. Not only does this stifle the educational systems of much needed funds, it also makes it difficult to fund projects which pay particular attention to the needs of women.

In Ghana, the 31st December Women’s Movement (the women’s wing of the ruling party has virtually usurped the role of the National Council of Women and Development. All development aid meant to improve the plight of women is channeled to this organization whose principal purpose is to drum up support for the ruling government.

Decisions that affect the educational system in most parts of Africa have been “imposed from above” without much consultation with the people affected. In Ghana, this has been particularly true of the Junior Secondary School (JSS) educational system. In spite of protests from the citizenry, the government proceeded to implement the system without much regard to the concerns expressed by critics of the system. Since this system is vocation-biased, it will surely channel many females into jobs such as dress-making, hair dressing and other low paying positions and help perpetuate the status quo. Of fifty Ghanaian women interviewed in a recent study, there were nine “petty traders”, ten hair dressers, seven dress makers, four fisher women and only four elementary school
Some researchers argue that many advances have been made in reducing the gender gap in human capabilities (UNESCO, 1991). However, data concerning the state of women, and African women in particular, continue to document inequality and its consequences (UNDP, 1995; Kurz and Prather, 1995; Njeuma, 1993; Stromquist, 1990, 1998; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995; Harding and Apea, 1990; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998; Conway and Borque, 1993). I agree that attempts have been made to reduce the gender gap in the towns and cities in Africa, but one must look at what happens to the majority of women who live in the rural areas. It is myopic to assume that because the gender gap has improved in the towns in Africa, the problem of equity has been resolved.

A few years ago among the older generation in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Sierra Leone and Liberia, a girl’s education was seen as not worth the cost. I remember my paternal grandmother telling my father that he was wasting money by sending me to a private school in Ghana because after all, I was a girl. The situation in some African countries is changing gradually because people are beginning to see the value of education, although some of the old practices still persist in many parts of the continent. In such areas, parents are willing to let a boy repeat a class rather than drop out but would allow their daughters to drop out. Parents who cannot afford to pay school fees for their children would rather allow their sons instead of their daughters to attend school. Thus decades of education have failed to eradicate one of the most direct forms of male bias in everyday attitudes. There is a marked preference for males on the part of men as well as women, illustrating how male bias in everyday attitudes and practices may be
rational for individuals who are highly constrained in the choices open to them (Elson, 1991). In many African cultures, men and women need someone to look after them in their old age. A married daughter is not likely to contribute to the support of her aging parents. Therefore, production systems that put a premium on the account of labor available to a household can only reinforce a preference for sons (Njeuma, 1993).

Currently the situation is changing; the majority of parents in Africa today are aware of the benefits of education. Parents want their children, irrespective of sex, to live better lives than they did. For this reason parents prefer that all their children have access to good education. They see it as fundamental in improving their children's life chances of living better in society. It has also become evident that the education of girls is very important. Compared to males, females tend to be more conscious of the need to care for aging parents (Njeuma, 1996; Egbo, 2000).
Chapter Five

Issues of Access and Equity

This chapter relies heavily on the texts listed in the methodology as sources of data. I will first summarize some of the most critical data on females in education in the sub-Saharan countries. Secondly, I provide data and a general overview of females access patterns. I discuss the development and trends of gender equity in education in several countries namely, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Kenya, Senegal, Cameroon and Sierra Leone because it is impossible to discuss all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in a few pages. Thirdly, I will offer brief critiques of each of the main sources with particular attention to theoretical and feminist issues. Fourth the discussion then focuses on some major themes that emerge from the studies This discussion focuses on some major themes; access and equity of females to education, participation at higher levels of schools, curriculum and academic performance. I conclude by summarizing what I take to be the authors’ best proposed strategies for closing the gender gap in education.

School Provision and Girls Access to Education

Access refers to both the opportunities to participate in education and the availability of facilities, which in many African countries are not distributed equally between male and female students. For example, there are different facilities available in rural and urban areas. Females who live in rural areas tend to lack many of the facilities that are available to those who live in urban areas. In rural areas, schooling is usually interrupted seasonally with farming and domestic chores. Many girls come from poor households, and girls tend to be more occupied with domestic activities than boys. Girls

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also tend to marry at a very early age compared to boys. In some areas, weather may affect school attendance because there is no schoolhouse. Classes are held under trees. Schools are underfunded, so there is shortage of adequate teaching materials, textbooks and qualified teachers. Many trained teachers prefer to live in urban areas where they have access to other amenities as well. Schools devote considerable amounts of time to written deskwork within an authoritarian structure. McSweeny and Freedman, (1982) have reported the neglected and disadvantaged position of rural African girls and women. In sub-Saharan Africa, a great disparity exists between rural and urban areas with 70% of the children in urban areas attending school in contrast to 9% of those in the rural areas.

Most researchers (e.g. Leach, 1998; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Adams and Kruppenbach, 1995) agree that since the years of independence considerable progress has been made in most African countries, toward extending previously restricted educational opportunities in a more equitable manner across regions of Africa and national subgroups. Rates of growth of between 1960 and 1980 have been particularly impressive. For the past ten years, the rates of growth have been almost double compared to other developing countries.

Even though there has been improved access for females, one can infer from the works cited that in Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Cameroon, regional variations in enrollment persist. This pattern is due to the commitment by the African governments to expand schools rapidly. It is therefore wrongly assumed by some that due to expansion girls and boys will have access to schools in more equal proportions. What happens is that between primary and secondary levels, female access is reduced partly because of the poor performance of girls in national examinations (Odag and Heneveld, 1995). Such performance is partly due to structural and systemic factors. Drop-out rates at the primary
level are high, with slightly more girls leaving than boys. Dropping out is usually associated with poor academic performance even though sometimes it may be due to parental, social and cultural factors.

Girls do not perform as well as boys at the primary and secondary levels (Mbilinyi, 1998; Hyde 1991). Adams and Kruppenbach (1986) report that in Liberia, the primary school gross enrollment ratio for females is only 52%. From 1978 to 1984, the female percentage of secondary school enrollments increased from 36% to 39%. School expansion policies have a marginal effect on female enrollment, increasing school places for girls by only one percent a year. For a long time, it was assumed that education at all levels was accessible to and benefited males and females in equal measure Leach (1998). The scale of gender inequality in access to education began to be recognized by governments and donor agencies once the initial post-independence in the 1950s and 1960s expansion of educational systems worldwide began to slow down. By the 1970s, it was evident that in sub-Saharan Africa girls were falling behind boys in all three indicators of educational participation, access (numbers enrolling), retention (length of time in school) and achievement (passing of exams especially in the sciences and technically related subjects). It appears that secondary enrollment for females tends to be higher in countries where the primary enrollment for girls is higher. At the tertiary level, the female gender gap in education is at its highest with male enrollments three times higher than females. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) report that once in school, girls often have a repetition, failure and dropout rates and this result in low completion rates.

In terms of access, Leach (1998) contends that achieving parity is not enough. Formal education should help women to improve their lives in a society, where they are economically, socially and politically subservient to men. Access to education should
enable women to obtain skilled work, exercise control over their bodies and their lives, take on leadership and representational roles, and be equal partners in decision making at the household, community and national level.

**Participation: The Pattern of Women's Educational Enrollment**

Most researchers agree that increasing girls’ participation in education has been one of the more serious challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa (Njeuma, 1993; Stromquist, 1998; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998; Mbilinyi, 1998). “Participation” refers to the extent to which individuals and groups enrol in and continue formal educational activities. Someone may enrol in a particular course in an educational institution but may not continue to the end. For a person to be “participating”, that person should successfully complete the programs he or she enrolls in. By this definition therefore, if a person enrolls in a course and drops she, they will not be considered to have successfully participated. Adams and Kruppenbach (1986) contend that the distinction between enrolling and continuing in an institution is important because enrolment and retention figures, which already reveal group variation in most countries, are not necessarily good indicators of actual attendance and attainments in schools or classes. Even though statistics on women’s participation in education in sub-Saharan Africa are incomplete, it is easy to discern a pattern. In most sub-Saharan African countries, most women do not enroll in and continue with formal educational activities and do not graduate at the same rate as men. In other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, school attendance is affected by the planting and harvesting of crops. Most families depend on small farms for income and subsistence. Farm produce needs to be harvested by manual labor. After harvesting the food crops, someone needs to sell them on the market, which in some cases may be in
other villages or towns. Everything associated with school and schoolwork is put on hold when crops are harvested and need to be marketed. Even though all children are expected to help with the farm work, girls end up not only helping on the farm but also selling the food crops on the market, sometimes during school days.


Stromquist, (1989) Odora, (1993) Leach, (1998) Adams and Kruppenbach, (1986) Bloch and Vavrus, (1998) all agree that an analysis of educational patterns in Africa on the whole shows that girls are less likely to attend school or to advance within the educational system as male counterparts. Enrolment ratios for African girls vary considerably as a function of regional and urban/rural residence. These patterns are not likely to improve significantly in the future without a concomitant improvement in the general economic performance of African states. From what has been discussed above, it is clear that female participation at the secondary and tertiary levels have not kept pace with primary level expansion (Adams and Kruppenbach 1986; Leach, 1998, Stromquist 1998; Bloch and Vavrus, 1998). There is the need for African governments to focus and invest more on the secondary and tertiary level in order to improve the participation rates of females. Adams and Kruppenbach, (1986) state that in Liberia, from 1978 to 1982, secondary school enrollments for females decreased from 30% to 26% at lower secondary and from 28% to 22% at the upper secondary level. Such a decrease was probably because the teaching methods reinforced social attitudes by reminding girls who attend that their objectives were to prepare for marriage and child bearing. For instance,
in most African countries, there is a systematic under-representation of women studying scientific and technical disciplines in universities; Harding and Apea (1990) amply document this problem in their research. It is not an unusual scenario that women make up a small percentage of those enrolled in sciences. Statistically speaking, as illustrated by (Kruppenbach and Adams, 1986), the proportion of males to females enrolled in science is seven to one; that is women constitute less than 12% the students. Beoku-Betts (1989) has concluded that most of the time adolescent girls' take on the traditional subjects and these place limits on girls' future possibilities. She also recognizes the need for a greater inclusion of girls in science, mathematics and technology subjects at all levels of higher education.

With regard to higher education, not only is this level accessible to very few women, but female enrollment is skewed towards conventional fields of study Stomquist (1989). There is a higher concentration of females students in the arts as opposed to the sciences. She provides data that indicate that 74% percent of female university students in sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled in the arts, i.e., education, social sciences, commerce and business. Only 24% were enrolled in the sciences. This pattern of distribution for field of study continues yet state policies do not make it a point to correct them. Stomquist (1998) further argues that despite the clear evidence of educational inequality, the factors that prevent girls from participating in schooling have received scant research and policy attention. In my opinion, although boys may be attracted to science courses and women to languages and home economics courses, it may reflect the formal school tradition and policy rather than the pupils' ability or interests. School practices may have to be examined to determine which the ways in which they direct females away from scientific and technical courses, which may lead to wage employment.
Critique of Texts

The total identification of education with schooling has not been favourable to women. The persistent poverty and marginalization of African women show that access to and participation in male biased institutions including the educational systems benefits only a tiny percentage of urban women who are able to succeed with the odds against them. The literature aims to address gender equity in education, but the published works give very little attention or acknowledgment to social justice work (from the margins) initiated by African women through local knowledges at the intersections of class, gender and culture.

The books and articles I used for this work make important contributions towards asserting the need for a continued inquiry toward deconstructing and transforming sites of oppression, marginalization and exploitation of Africa and African women (Conway and Borque, 1993; Njeuma, 1993; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995 Odora, 1992; Harding and Apea, 1990). The authors argue that patriarchy continues to dominate power relations in African states and that little attention and few resources have been allocated to support forms of intervention that are not merely reproductive of the alienation, oppression, marginality and the exploitation of women.

The idea one gets in the literature is that African women lack the knowledge for ‘appropriate’ socioeconomic participation and that with the transmission of knowledge or skills to African women the power structure can change (Egbo, 2000; Adams and Kruppenbach, 1986). This view of African women not being able to cope with their situation undermines the ways in which African women have resisted situations in their everyday lives (Etta, 1994; Amadiume, 1987). It also disregards African women’s indigenous knowledges (Dei, Hall and Goldin-Rosenberg, 2000) and the advances of
politically organized women's groups educating themselves for change or socio-political, economic, spiritual, health and a sexual revolution (Dei and Connelly, 1999; Leach, 1998). I will now briefly comment on each source.

The authors in Bloch, Beoku-Betts, and Tabachnick, (1998) hold different theoretical perspectives but they support an ongoing consideration of the relations of identity, power and difference in African education. In terms of difference, the authors concentrate mainly on gender but they cannot talk about gender without considering other differences like race, ethnicity and language. In this text, inconsistencies arise at the disjunction between viewing African women as agents towards gender equity in education and African women as artifacts of hegemonic relations who are rendered passive, subordinated recipients of knowledge. African women are seen as passive who respond to change literally exerted upon them. Yet how do we African women reconcile this with an alternative sense of an African woman who is constructive, productive and creates spaces for maximizing her capacity for social justice or gender equity in society. The book assumes that trends affect women more than men. They imply that the social and economic constraints on women's lives arise externally in abstraction from their everyday experiences. This frame treats men and women as objects acted upon by social forces and not as agents and actors in their daily experiences.

Egbo's, (2000) book is about women's access to literacy and how it affects all spheres of women's private and social life within organized society, including issues of power, politics, economics, demographics, health, child welfare as well as women's psychological well being. The book addresses the implications of low literacy levels among women for society as a whole. Unlike previous research, which is normally conducted in western countries, this research was conducted in two communities in
southwestern Nigeria. The research is based on the views of a group of literate and non-literate women in a rural community in Nigeria. As such, it is based on African women themselves. By using the views of the participants as data, her work gives voice to the women themselves in search of workable solutions to their condition. The main objective of the study is to determine the extent to which women attribute their living conditions to literacy or the lack of it.

The perspective in this book is that in the past years, women in sub-Saharan Africa have survived in their respective communities independently of literacy. Given current global trends, the question is the quality and the nature of that survival. The author argues that there is a critical need not only to challenge disabling social structures, but access to literacy can give females wider choices and better life options.

She argues that critical social policies juxtaposed with the right kind of literacy will continue to empower African women. The author admits that literacy is not the solution to all the social problems faced by women and other marginalized groups. It is, however, necessary to enable women understand their social, political and material world. The author believes that although sub-Saharan Africa is not a homogeneous society, similarities and systems of thought among most of the African communities suggest that this work could have significant implications for policy formulation not only in Nigeria but also throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Like Odora, she questions whether western style literacy is relevant to women in sub-Saharan Africa. The book written from the perspective of a continental African lends support of the situations she describes.

Conway and Bourque (1993) provide a collection of essays, reflections and commentary by leading thinkers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America who are concerned with education as a means of improving women's social status. I concentrate on the
section of the book that deals with Africa. In that section, all the writers are Africans. As Africans, they bring alternative perspectives to gender issues in African education. In my opinion they are likely to understand their countries and are able to properly address the issues much better than non-African authors writing on the topic. The concerns raised by the authors are that the past thirty years have brought a remarkable expansion in women's educational access in Africa. Nevertheless inequality persists not only in access but also in educational experience. The authors see the need for major reforms in the content of the curriculum, in the structure of schools and in the concept of education.

There are enormous differences in the societies they describe, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe. The cultural and historical differences are reflected in varying levels of economic growth literacy and educational access. The authors point out that class, ethnic, religious and regional differences make the experience of women within any single country unique. The authors acknowledge the importance of educational institutions and agree that educational institutions are powerful agents of change even though education may play a conservative role when in the hands of conservative authorities. All the authors stress the need to think about a systematic reform about how to advance new agendas for teaching curriculum materials, and for the transformation of knowledge in both the formal and informal systems.

The perspective used in this volume is that the persistence of patriarchal cultures and social systems imposes constraints on the educational system as a vehicle for women's liberation. The authors note that sex bias is inherent in the formal school system and this is reflected in the curriculum, text, facilities, teachers and administration. Girls' access to education has not eliminated the male bias which is found in western culture
and in turn, reflected in the educational systems in Africa which are patterned after the west.

The authors in this text, like some of the others, tend to see women as passive and helpless beings who are not able to make any sense of the situations they find themselves in. However, as discussed elsewhere in this work, authors such as Amedume (1987), Dei (1999) and Etta (1994) show how women in most parts of Africa are able to make sense of their daily experiences.

The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations funded the work. It was not carried out as part of policy generation for governments or development agencies. It grew out of the Holyoke College Sesquicentennial Conference on worldwide education for women. Its main aim was to highlight the importance of women’s education. As with other research that is funded, we must ask, do the authors portray the situations as they find them or do they appropriate the research to suit what the donors’ interests?

The theoretical perspective of Kelly and Elliot, (1982) is that social and economic outcomes of women’s education are shaped by sex-gender systems that place women in subordination to men. Such a system influences the ability of women to obtain an education, as well as the type of education schools distribute to women. Instead of asking whether education has the same outcomes for males and females, this volume asks how different provisions for schooling in third world nations reduce or exacerbate the unequal outcomes detected in previous research with the aim of providing policy guidelines for reform.

The perspective of the authors is that in all societies women respond to institutions in ways that meet the needs women perceive, given the circumstances of their daily lives. Women receive education depending on a host of factors other than the
availability of educational opportunity. A woman's education is also affected by the beliefs of girls and their families. A common concern of this volume is how ethnicity, social class and rural urban factors interact to predict female responses to school, as reflected in attendance, retention rates in school, acceptance of school-legitimated knowledge or the uses to which educated women put their schooling despite the obstacles in the society as a whole.

Unlike past research, this volume does not focus on whether education has the same social and economic outcomes for males and females. Previous research on women's education ignored sex-gender systems that limit women to narrowly defined roles, consigning them to political and economic inferiority. Such studies merely chart the differences in educational outcomes for men and women and are at a loss to explain whether these differences are socially generated and if so how.

How does education affect women and what can be done to improve the lives of women, since schooling throughout the world functions in the context of social systems that oppress women? The authors maintain that schools should not merely reinforce such systems but can be made into instruments to transform those very systems.

The text of Odaga and Heneveld, (1995) outlines the main factors that affect female education in Africa. The authors state specifically that their main objective is to inform educational practitioners and policy makers of the major research findings concerning factors that constrain female schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. Their aim is to identify gaps in knowledge and the understanding of these factors, and most importantly to outline how accumulated knowledge can be used to implement policies and programs that promote female participation.
The theoretical perspective Odaga and Heneveld (1995) use is that there are cultural, social, political economic, institutional and religious factors that prevent many females from getting educated. Donors, governments and NGOs have been working together to develop programs to improve girls’ participation or access to education but women’s access to education remain limited in several areas. Although their emphasis is on gender, difference is handled well in his research. One problem, though, is that the authors treat education of females as absolutely necessary for social and economic development in Africa.

The Technical Department of the World Bank funded the research. The main aim of the research was for formulating policies in education. Like all funded projects, one is not sure whether they are publishing their actual findings or just trying to satisfy their sponsors.

The view of Adams and Kruppenbach, (1986) is that at the close of the international decade for women, female participation in formal education and the status of women should increase. But the combination of low enrolment growth projections and generally unfavorable economic forecasts for the future suggests that education in Africa is regressing instead of stabilizing.

The authors also consider other differences that need to be addressed by educational policy makers. They argue that education be viewed as the “modus operandi” to prepare women for an expanded scope of participation and a more dynamic role as change agents. Like the other researchers discussed, Adams and Kruppenbach (1986) treat females as objects acted upon by social forces and not as change agents and actors in their daily experiences.
Odora’s (1992) study uses two theoretical frameworks, a socialist feminist and the African indigenous perspective to facilitate a critical understanding of possible motives for the reluctance of African parents to entrust their children, especially girls, to the schooling process. After defining patriarchy, she considers an African indigenous perspective, which situates patriarchy against the backdrop of Africa’s history. It identifies colonialism and neocolonial relations as manifestations of global patriarchy operationalized through Western capitalism. In this perspective Odora, (1992) also recognizes that the third world including Africa, is subsumed in a set of relations in which some men (who control world capitalism) rule over other men, women, children and nature. At the same time solidarity is maintained between men across different levels that ensures their control over female labor.

The African indigenous perspective puts patriarchy against the backdrop of Africa’s history and identifies in colonialism and neocolonial relations a form of global patriarchy, operationalized through western capitalism. It also recognizes that the ‘third world’ including Africa, is subsumed in a set of relations in which some men (who control world capitalism) rule over other men, women, children and nature. At the same time solidarity is maintained between men across different levels that ensures their control over female labor.

This study, like Egbo’s (2000), portrays efforts by oppressed and subjugated peoples to either resist encroachments, or preserve essential elements of their culture, which may be assumed by the dominant group either as a problem or as a handicap to gender equity in education. Like some of the other texts, difference is not emphasized. She concentrates mainly on gender without considering other differences such as race, class, language and ethnicity.
In Leach's (1998) work, she claims that minorities of women acquire skills, which equip them for paid employment. From her perspective, schooling has not changed their subordinate position or changed the deep-rooted views of women's primary role as unpaid wives or mothers. Hence the kind of education offered to girls merely serve to reinforce the status quo of patriarchal relations by preparing young girls to accept a predetermined future under the control of men and boys who are taught that they should expect to exercise this control as their "natural" right. So if one accepts that society is structured along different lines (i.e., gender, class and race), then the school, one of society's fundamental institutions reflects the structure in society.

Even though Leach (1998) concentrates on gender she considers other forms of differences (i.e. gender, race and class) in society that affects schooling and education. Her argument is that educational initiatives are flawed because they are donor driven and do not help alleviate the gender gap. She indicates that the most empowering projects have been those which women themselves have initiated; women deciding on their own training needs without any help from outside. This article sees women as actors towards gender equity, and thus avoids some of the pitfalls of the other authors who see women as passive and always waiting for external assistance.

The text by Harding and Apea, (1990) is a profile of women scientists and technologists. These women give accounts of their early lives and show how important they have found the encouragement and support of their families—parents, grandparents, sisters, uncles and aunts in their lives. Some of the women refer to the support they got from their teachers. The authors emphasize that if women are encouraged, they can do well in any subjects especially science and mathematics. Secondly, reading the profiles of these women will encourage other women.
The authors use a “Woman In Development” approach and address some of the questions I have raised in this thesis. The WID paradigm has been a dominant framework for analyzing women’s role in sustainable development; it has gained currency among feminist researchers. The approach used by the authors identifies the main difficulty for women as their exclusion from the development process. This approach prescribes the inclusion of women in the development process, accompanied by special women’s projects and components, the principal objective being to increase women’s productivity and income. One should however, realize that directly involving women in development projects has the potential of risking the opposition of men who may fear that the change might disrupt the status quo and threaten their power positions.

Some literature available on the Women In Development approach suggests that many husbands and village elders cease to resist women’s participation so long as women produce income to supplement the family income. The weakness here is that this approach is inclined to treat women as a mere human resource used to promote development for the good of the community, but not necessarily for the direct benefit of the women themselves.

The emphasis on women in development programs is often about issues related to the broader development needs of society. It is assumed that modernization, whatever that means, improves the conditions of women. Researchers have found many flaws in the WID concept. Etta (1994), for example, notes that very little attention is given to the ways in which education affects economic development, and that this framework is insufficient to address the issue of gender inequity in education.

Like Beoku-Betts et al (1999), the authors of this text address gender equity in education but give very little attention to race, class, culture, language and ethnicity.
They focus mainly on women from the urban centers who belong to an elite or educated class. This approach mainly benefits those who live in the urban areas and thus perpetuates the status quo. Women in this text are not passive, however; they are able to resist any constraints they may find while they pursue their education or professions. The research was funded by the Commonwealth secretariat in London. It is likely that this research, like many others, was carried out as part of the policy-generation for governments or developing agencies.

Despite the contributions of the authors (Bloch, Tabachnick, Beoku-Betts, 1998; Leach 1998; Conway and Borque, 1993; Kelly and Elliot, 1998; Harding and Apea, 1990; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995; Adams and Kruppenbach, 1986; Odora, 1992), an African centered approach to the construction of gender within critical pedagogy, and the possibility to claim voice for difference in education and schooling has still not gained prominence in research about education or schooling in African contexts.

Except for a few examples, the body of work dealing with educational reform for gender equity in Africa does not consider the implications of African women’s ability to make sense of their everyday experiences. The authors theorize about African women’s oppression in terms of agencies beyond African women. A contradiction arises where the voices of researchers claim authority to speak on behalf of and in prescription for African women as ‘Others’. We must ask, what does it mean to construct and operate within a form that fits data to decontextualized frame?

There is no doubt that all the authors I discuss see the need to promote female access to and participation in existing formal education. As mentioned earlier, while improving access and participation for females is clearly necessary, it is not sufficient to transform gender power relations in schools or African education. The articulation of
these texts of African women's education brings to mind questions about the meaning of location and power. What are the implications of beginning to situate multiple voices of the researchers and African women? How do we contextualize a researcher's assumptions, inferences and extrapolations?

Critical scholarship must also ask the following questions: how does schooling and education connect to the labour, political, economic or cultural and historical contexts of development? How do gender relations inform educational practice in Africa? How does educational research attend to questions of power, language, identity and representation? What are the different responsibilities of the state, local governments and international financial capital in the search for gender equity in education and social justice in Africa. What are the postcolonial challenges in African education? What are the theoretical and policy implications of centering women in African educational practice?

In rethinking education and schooling issues in Africa, critical scholarship must consider how to attend to the social construction of relations constituting women's possibilities for participating in education or schooling. This approach is within and beyond the ideologies inherent to a systemic of national and global economic/political interests serving those aligned with a white, patriarchal western elite.

Having reviewed the works in detail, I reflect on the issue of agency. Trends come and go and are only treated as peripherally important. Women's position in the literature portrays a picture of women as the problem and that women's exclusion from education has hindered progress in Africa. Women are not the problem but the social relationships between them and men. Women in Africa are subordinated as a result of patriarchy. This is rooted in the unequal relations of power that prevent equitable distribution of resources including education.
African feminists are actively seeking equal access to economic, legal, political, and educational resources for females. Although most African feminists may be highly educated and come from mainly upper-middle class backgrounds, women who are less educated and come from lower middle class also fight against inequality. For example, Nigerian women have been known to successively demonstrate against tax increases by the government. In Ghana, market women played an active role in resisting the introduction of the Value Added Tax by the Rawlings’ government. Protests by less educated and lower middle-class women may not question gender relations as such, but they take part in demonstrations that oppose infringements on their basic rights and freedom, which refutes the stereotype of the passive and victimized African woman.

Resistance does not have to take one form and there is no one path to empowerment or one right way to enact resistance against oppressive power relations (Chaundry, 2000). The terms of resistance and bids for empowerment emerge out of the specific circumstances of a particular life, and no one should determine the terms and which bids are more efficacious. What matters is the challenging of power relations.

Researchers, educationalists and policy makers will have to realize that it is not for them to dictate the direction in which gender relations should go, but to ensure that all women have the capacity, space, and support they need to make their own directions.

Curriculum and Academic Performance

Curriculum and academic performance are two major issues that need to be addressed in African schools. These have to do with power relations, social interaction and rules and regulations. Curriculum consists of everything in the school environment. It also refers to a collection of cultural knowledge. Curriculum has been an area in dispute
surrounding the struggle against gender discrimination. In most school curricula, the texts, organization of knowledge and some values that reflect male dominance are promoted as the norm. In many curriculum materials (e.g., texts and films), one finds stereotyping of sex roles which depict men as breadwinners, workers, heroes and people with self confidence. Women are depicted in more traditional roles such as dressmakers, hairdressers, teachers and housekeepers who perform mainly domestic and caring roles. Odaga and Heneveld (1995), Stromquist (1994) and Leach (1998) report that curriculum and teacher training have been ignored. It is especially in these two areas that messages and practices and beliefs crystallize gender ideologies.

In most African educational systems, there are tracking systems for the instructional opportunities of females, most particularly in the fields of science, technology and vocational education. Teachers and administrators do not treat all students equally. Streaming curriculum tracks, attention giving and stereotyping are all forms of differential treatment favoring male students. Adams and Kruppenbach (1986) note that there has been a tradition in the African schooling systems to segregate women into home economics and pre-nursing while reserving the programs in agriculture, masonry, woodworking, technical drawing and automotive trades to men. Citing Smock (1981) they further note that in Kenya, women were legally excluded from government, technical and vocational schools in the 1970s and discouraged from applying for most types of post secondary, government, career-training programs.

The content of a school’s curriculum can influence students’ self concept, motivation and teacher-achievement expectations. In any school curriculum, there is the need to examine whether the curriculum accurately reflects the historical contribution of all groups to the development of their community and nation. Second, there is the need to
examine whether there is evidence of demeaning or condescending language, for example, ethnocentric or sexist language in reference to certain groups or delimiting stereotypical images in the materials that make up the curriculum.

Research on women and education shows that textbooks used in most developing countries persistently portray negative stereotypes about women (Tembo, 1984). Images of women as subservient to men are perpetuated in most African societies; that they penetrate and pervade educational materials. Leach (1998) argues that one barrier to girls' achievement, which tends to be ignored, derives from gender stereotyping in the curriculum, especially in textbooks. In such books, girls tend to be portrayed as passive, modest and shy while boys are seen as assertive, brave and ambitious. Kinjanjui (1993) also points out that textbooks in secondary schools in Kenya portray women and their role in society in an unfavorable light. When girls learn from such materials, they are likely to have distorted attitudes and aspirations. The effect can be that some may drop out of school or refrain from selecting science-based and practical subjects.

Teachers may show different attitudes towards male and female students. In these circumstances, a boy is assumed to need a career and a girl, a husband. Teachers tend to be dismissive and discouraging towards girls and give more classroom time to boys. Girls who are encouraged to pursue a career are expected to opt for "caring" professions such as teaching and nursing. The hidden curriculum of school practice reinforces messages about girls' inferior status on a daily basis and provides them with negative learning experiences. This creates a culture of low self-esteem and low aspirations. Anderson-Levitt, Bloch and Soumare, (1998) have also shown how even well-intentioned teachers and students themselves engage in practices that put girls at a disadvantage. In such institutions the authorities see the value of schooling for girls, but analysis of the
pedagogical methods used to help the children acquire knowledge shows that they may have negative outcomes of schooling for girls. Growing up in Ghana, I witnessed how parents' and teachers held greater expectations of boys than of girls. Most of the time boys were treated differently in class and received more attention and intellectual challenge compared to girls.

In curriculum studies conducted in Ghana and Kenya, primary and middle schools from 1955 through 1972, Smock (1981) concluded, that in Ghana the history was formulated by men; society is managed and economies develop through the work of men. The portrayal of women was notable primarily through their absence. In the curriculum of Kenya, Smock (1981) found similar tendencies. The thematic emphasis on individual rulers, their wars, and their interactions with colonial agents and administrators left little room for the contributions of women.

Stromquist (1998) and Odora (1993) also argue that the patriarchal ideology produces differential expectations among parents and teachers regarding boys and girls. In many African countries, men dominate in many areas of decision making. Even some educated females tend to buy into the notion that girls and women are subordinate to men and as such should not strive for the same goals as men. It is necessary to note that these problems are not limited to African education. Adams and Kruppenbach (1986), notes that the results of several analyses of primary grades reading texts conducted in the U.S. reveal females portrayed in certain occupations significantly less often than men. Women were often placed in very limited positions, such as teachers, nurses, dressmakers and telephone operators. To change such views, this notion needs to be confronted and questioned.
Stromquist (1998) argues that a subject matter that could have a particularly positive effect on both boys and girls is sex education. Although this course is offered in most African schools, the curricula, concentrates more on biological rather than social aspects of sexuality. If the social aspects of sexuality are emphasized in such courses, it can go a long way to help reduce gender inequity in many African countries. Such courses might help counteract pressures on girls for early marriage and childbearing.

**Strategies for Closing the Gender Gap**

Many initiatives have been undertaken to close the gender gap that exists in education in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Leach (1998), Stromquist (1998), Mbilinyi (1998), policies on gender and education in most African countries have been donor-driven, and secondly initiatives to close the gap has not been to address the causes of gender inequity but has been largely confined to strategies to increase girls’ access to education. What one notices is that even the girls who stay in school, many end up taking traditional courses such as sewing, teaching, home economics. These fields limit future possibilities.

Beoku-Betts, et al (1998) also recognizes the need for the greater inclusion of girls in science, math and technology subjects at all levels of higher education. While this is a laudable goal or objective, it will be difficult to implement what the authors are suggesting. It would mean that girls would be forced to take courses or subjects they may ordinarily not be interested in. It will mean “planting” girls in science courses for the sake of doing so. Another way of achieving this same objective will be a general campaign to encourage girls to take science courses starting at the lower secondary school levels. It may mean having more female science teachers, special tutorial courses for girls facing
problems in science courses or, at an extreme level, building scientific institutions purposely for girls.

Most governments in sub-Saharan Africa are poor. They are heavily dependent on aid to supplement their budgets. They appear to place girls’ education at the top of their list of concerns, regardless of whether they will be committed to it or not. There has been very little attempt to introduce and implement gender policy in education, which would require the institutionalization of gender analysis and affirmative action.

I share the opinion of Leach (1998) and others that ministries of women’s affairs in African countries have had limited powers and resources to attach high priority to girls’ education and hence the limited impact.

Researchers (Stromquist, 1994; Leach, 1998; Odaga and Heneveld, 1995; King and Hill, 1993) have reported how donors and governments in Sub-Saharan Africa take a superficial approach to the problem. They do not see an urgent need to introduce radical changes to the educational systems or change social attitudes towards girls’ education. They seemingly fail to grasp the link between the low enrollment of girls and women’s subordinate status. Leach (1998) suggests that governments in Africa fear that by introducing radical changes to the educational system, they would overturn the existing system of patriarchy. In fact, governments and donor initiatives tend to make minute changes with the system rather than change it or reform it completely. They rather focus on creating more schools and provide incentives to get girls into them and provide incentives to get girls into school. For instance, they try to provide scholarships, free uniforms and feeding programs and building schools closer to the communities and recruiting more female teachers especially in the societies where co-education is frowned upon and parents are reluctant to have their female children taught by male teachers.
Leach (1998) and Mbilinyi (1998) argue that the impact of this approach to change attitudes towards female education is doubtful. This seems easier than changing deeply entrenched social and cultural practices.

Leach (1998) (see also Odaga and Heneveld, 1995) argues that schooling does little to address the underlying causes of gender inequities in society. Attempts to get more girls into school have taken place in a social context where men usually dominate in all areas of decision making and authority and women are expected to play a subordinate acquiescent role. It is not surprising that most attempts or commitments to close the "gender gap" in basic education have been ineffective.

Beoku-Betts (1998) and Stromquist (1998) are hopeful about the prospects for educational reform through local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). They have stated that non-governmental organizations are the indisputable new actors in the educational scene in developing countries. These organizations have emerged as agencies capable of providing services that the state cannot or will not provide. They are service organizations with the right to demand financial support from their states. Many of them offer better outreach and commitment to disadvantaged groups than their states would do. NGOs are efficient and have a different conception of what development should be. This is because they uphold a view of social change in which more attention is paid to the rural areas and less emphasis is placed on industrialization. NGOs are often run by women and distinguish themselves by their ability to address women's problems in a multifaceted way. They try to combine not only needs of women in the reproductive sphere but also in the productive and emancipatory dimensions (Stromquist, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998).
Despite the efforts of these organizations to mobilize women for national construction, there has been some criticism of NGOs as being capital oriented. Mikkel (1989) points out that these organizations are not autonomous bodies who are able to withstand the challenges of political instability. These organizations tend to work in harmony with the government in power. Like most politicians, male politicians use their services and the support of the majority of women to enhance their own political careers. In Africa, some politicians either take funds from existing women’s organizations or have the organized women to serve their own self interest rather than that of the women they claim to represent (Amadiume, 1987).

The works reviewed reveal a picture of women’s condition in sub-Saharan Africa. The fact is that African women who live in urban areas are doing better than before. In terms of access to education and years of education attained, some African women have succeeded, but problems still remain in several areas: the content of curriculum materials, the social and organizational arrangements used in schools, classrooms, teachers’ attitudes and the design and scope of formal educational programs.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the rural areas have not benefited much from with formal education. The problems that women face are subtle but persistent and cumulative. The majority of women accept the social norms and develop social expectations that have little room for ‘unconventional’ ways of being or thinking. Some women have held and are still in charge of state offices. Some also a part in the formulation of educational policies and in the administration of the country’s educational system. A few women by contrast are able to escape some of these influences and contribute to research on women and education.
I believe that with education women are capable of acquiring a consciousness of their problems and taking initiatives to remedy them. Research on education must emphasize that the African states should support programs that will enable women to abandon their stereotypical roles and train in occupations that will help them to be independent. I agree with Kelly (1984) that the determinants of women’s access to education are not the same as those for men; because research is based on the assumption of similar determinants for both male and female, it has yielded adverse results. Such investigations have proposed conclusions that either blame the victim or attribute female under-enrollment to certain factors in ‘culture’ or state of the economy. Research without prescriptions for reform by policy makers cannot bring about the required change.

Generally speaking governments in Africa do not see gender inequality as a problem and something that they should solve. There is the need for more research on women and education in Africa, which should focus on how school provisions, the quality, content and organization of education, affects female attendance. Such research may provide an action-oriented agenda for governments on which to base future efforts to eradicate gender disparity or inequality in education. There is the need for much in-depth research and analysis in order to understand women, education and development from the point of “poor” women in Africa. Women’s organizations need to bring pressure to bear on the governments.

Researchers such as Odora, (1993) see patriarchy as the main cause of African parents refusing to send their female children to school, but I share the view of Stromquist (1992) to argue that schools should not be seen merely as reproducers of patriarchy”. The effect of such a frame of thought on educational practice is quite simply demobilizing. It implies a pessimistic view of teachers, takes an ironic view of the
consequences of their work, and tends to view pupils as passively receiving a social imprint” (p.2).

It is best that we understand the potential and the limitations of existing educational programs for women. This will enable researchers, educators and policy makers to find solutions to the gender inequity in schools. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa should examine gender inequalities or disparity in education and develop policies, which may be useful for developing state strategies to eradicate gender inequality. States decide upon which collective benefits and services should be made available to individuals and groups (Stromquist, 1987). Most of the reports reviewed identify the state as a key institution in explaining the source of gender inequality. Consequently the state needs to initiate should initiate programs designed to bring about greater gender equality for all. A state would move in that direction if organized political pressure is brought to bear on it.

In our modern world today, higher education is very desirable because formal education and credentials are socially and economically rewarded. It is therefore necessary for individuals to attain prestige and power. Women need to be educated as far as they can because it provides them with the credentials and the critical knowledge of society that will allow them to understand and change the conditions of subordination they face. As many women get educated they will be able to create new conditions for women’s education which will eventually ensure female equity in the educational system.

Even though tremendous strides have been made to eradicate some of the inequities, which existed before, I believe that much more needs to be done. Parents, educators (teachers and administrators) policy makers, researchers and government have a responsibility to change the systemic patterns of gender socialization in the African
educational system. Women must undertake in an organized way, to influence key educated institutions and the state.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

On Rethinking Schooling: New Issues

The texts analyzed in this thesis show how African females are at a disadvantage in terms of education. Most of them demonstrate that education does not seem to have the same social and economic outcomes for women as it is for men. Much of the research on women’s education and its outcomes tends to ignore the issues of gender that limit women to narrowly defined roles, which prevent them from participating in the economic and political roles in their societies. I share the opinion of many researchers on African education who argue that instead of concentrating solely on gender inequities, we should look at the local, national and international influences that help maintain gender inequity in the African society (Kelly, 1989; Stromquist, 1998; Elson, 1991). There are factors that need to be examined with respect to gender disparity at the secondary and tertiary levels in African education. These are educational policies, school curriculum structures, cultural practices and the expectations of the society regarding of gender-differentiated roles and accomplishments.

Many training programs for advanced education that lead to skilled manual jobs in technological areas require qualifications that are usually acquired in secondary schools. Most of the time, girls are unlikely to have studied these subjects (Acker, 1984). Although there are no requirements, vocational courses in colleges and government training schemes tend to be highly sex-segregated. Subjects in school which are popular with girls for example, home economics have relatively few applications outside domestic contexts (Mbilinyi, 1998; Kinyanjui, 1993).
The rate of change in Africa in the 1990s makes more women uncertain and confused. There is also a lack of a labor force trained to use new technologies and able to adapt to change. This is a major weakness of the African educational and industrial system. There is therefore the need for continuous learning, adult education skills for development and learning for life. This approach would help us solve many of the problems women have with access to education and the labor market. Hendry (1984) contends that not linking jobs and education closely means continued inequality for women. A lot of gender inequity problems would be reduced if education at all levels and work were linked. Women would then seize the opportunity to prepare themselves for a better tomorrow. One possible disadvantage here is that the scope of education will narrow toward vocational needs only. It is also becoming an increasingly common worldwide practice to train specifically for certain jobs and vocations. This phenomenon suggests that women must take major responsibility for changing their situation because lack of access to appropriate educational and training opportunities perpetuates their continued marginalization from social, economic, and political power. The expectation has always been that a woman’s main responsibility is with the family. Women may have to take more scientific and technological related courses in order that they have more jobs available to them.

Given the development and educational reform going on in African countries, educators need to work together with policy makers to implement educational reforms that take the needs of females into account. Democratization or access may not be the sole answer, but it is a huge step forward in this process. This process may, however, require some time to change the gender disparity in the educational system.
Improving the lives of girls or females involves providing a foundation for intellectual and social development through early childhood stimulation and education. Services for boys and girls therefore need not differ. In areas where gender discrimination is identified, strategies are needed to convince local, national and family decision-makers, both men and women, that girls need to receive equal access to educational services right from their birth.

**Implications**

Intellectuals need to critically evaluate the way they produce, reproduce and distribute knowledge and action. The character of the state continues to be patriarchal, and it is likely that new information on the conditions of women will not be collected by the state and even if collected, will not be used (Beoku-Betts, 1998).

A serious literacy problem exists in Africa as a whole. Close to half of the countries on the continent have literacy rates lower than forty percent. On the average, twenty-one percent of the women are illiterate compared to men. This means that many women are being left out of the economic and technical changes affecting their societies (UNESCO, 1988; Stromquist, 1998).

The expectation with development projects is that building more schools will enable more girls attend primary and secondary schools. Research indicates that the incorporation of girls in schools is predicated on their not being required for domestic work. If situation disappears, as is likely in an economic crisis, fewer girls will be able to take advantage of the increased opportunities to attend school. If attention is given only to the expansion of schools and not their content, women will be the ones who continue to be penalized. Women need to understand how gender conditions oppress them, which
means that the content and practice of education will have to change (Stromquist, 1989, 1998; Weis, 1980).

The contents of textbooks and learning materials will have to be examined carefully because the messages and images foster the reproduction of conventional roles of women in society. Until these are corrected, women will continue to receive images that support patriarchal ideology and asymmetrical divisions of labor.

Teachers’ attention, which is normally given to males, will have to change and equal attention given to all children in schools. Teachers and parents will have to change their attitudes and hold the same expectations for females as males. Most teachers should not have biased career expectations for students that favor men over women.

If there should be a complete change on gender issues, I believe that it is not only a matter of educating women but men will have to be educated and taught that less emphasis should be put on a division of roles. Men will have to contribute substantially to the diagnosis and understanding of male bias and campaign to overcome it.

As discussed above, family decisions affect the participation and access to education of girls. Parents negatively shape the type of education their daughters have by allowing their sons’ education to take precedence over their daughters’ and using daughters to perform domestic tasks. Some parents also endorse religious or cultural values that allow gender separation or domestic responsibilities for women. I share the opinion of Stromquist (1989) that schools also fail to set up facilities that are reasonably close to home or provide for higher grades of schooling. The school and family seem to reinforce each other. While parents do not insist that the schools offer suitable learning facilities for their children the schools do not discourage the practice of using girls for domestic tasks.
Although some democratization of access is evident for girls relative to boys, questions need to be raised as to the utility of this framework for understanding the impact of educational expansion on the role and status of women. Given the differential nature of school or occupational articulation for females and males, a simple comparison of educational access may tell us little about the reality of women's lives when they leave school. We must be very careful not to infer that democratization of access necessarily means increased opportunities for females (Weis, 1979; Sjujaa, 1994).

I share the view with most researchers that education especially for females is critical for development. However, education and development do not necessarily go hand in hand. Such problems are not unique to Africa. There is the need for more comparative investigative studies to find out ways in which more women can be encouraged to enter and perform well in school and especially non-traditional disciplines. The issue at stake is that more women and girls are concentrated in a limited number of fields of study. Positive action should be taken by governments, policy makers, and educationalists to ensure that women have better access and participation in technical and scientific areas of secondary and tertiary levels of education. Even though some effort is now being made to reverse this trend in some secondary schools in sub-Saharan countries, research will have to emphasize the need for a development of appropriate curricula, teaching materials and a supportive training environment.

I share the view of Dei and connelly (1999) that new research must contribute to the development of a body of knowledge that addresses the concrete needs and experiences of policy makers, teachers, students, parents or guardians, elders and local communities for genuine and social transformation. Paradigms and theoretical approaches that make meaningful connections to the lived experiences of African peoples
must shape educational policy and practice. Researchers cannot push for theories that privilege education and the cultivation of the intellectual mind and capacity as residing outside the spiritual and emotional needs of people concerned. As researchers we must transform the Eurocentric assumptions embedded in much theorizing about Africa.

The principles of the African knowledge system are not included in African school curricular materials but this has a great relevance for educational pedagogy, curricular development and reforming educational equity and accessibility as well as for educational policy and accountability and transparency (Dei, 1998, Egbo, 2000). I share the view of researchers (Dei, 1998; Etta, 1994) who argue that there is the need for new forms of schooling and education in the African context which will require policy makers, educational practitioners and theorists, parents, students, and learners to work together. Improving the status of women will therefore require a reorientation of development and development efforts; a redefinition of key concepts such as education to include schooling and learning in the home and off school sites and empowerment, and gender development planning to improve the range and quality of integrated gender responsive operations. A conceptual approach to gender issues in education is of immediate necessity to improve the gender sensitivity of educational provision and analysis and to offer an acceptable or common approach to addressing gender issues in education (Etta, 1994).

The role of the African state is to ensure that schooling and education serve the needs and aspirations of all people. Gender equity cannot be easily attained in an environment in which national economic policies squeeze the masses, and international capital interests are soaring (Dei, 1998; 1993). There is a need to rethink the African state as the main provider of education. There should be a redefinition of different roles for
multiple parties such as communities, schools and churches. This can help devise genuine options for education. There should also be alternate ways for educational resources in the current circumstances of World Bank and IMF-inspired structural adjustment and post structural adjustment policies, which are causing havoc to local peoples.

Rethinking African education means finding appropriate ways to address all forms of educational inequities in the educational system. These inequities are structured along ethnic, gender, regional, language, religion and class lines. Women are under-represented in mathematics, science and technology (Njeuma, 1993; Etta, 1994; Harding and Apea, 1990, Mbilinyi, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 1998; Puja, 2000). This limits educational opportunities for females. These should be pressing concerns not only for researchers, but also for everyone in society. Finally, I share the view of Dei, (1998) who asserts that addressing of inequities should extend beyond the availability of material resources to a political and moral commitment to fight educational injustice, because issues of academic excellence and educational equity are inextricably linked.

Schools have a potential to transform gender relations in educational institutions. They can only do this by transforming themselves first. Educational institutions and teachers must offer students curricula and pedagogy that are sensitive to the needs of culture, gender, language and class, a curriculum that engages in analysis of difference and action and which encourages both girls and boys to reach their full potential. Governments and donors need to move away from narrow and superficial interventions and seek to support the transformation of schooling within the broad programs of social and economic reform that will remedy the gender inequity in African schools.
Bibliography


