

Review

## **Is There Need for Integrating Feminist Moral Framework in Nigerian Educational Policy**

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**Abstract:** This paper highlights the non-integration of the moral framework in Nigerian educational policy, and non-integration is not a significant barrier to achieving gender equality in education. It explores that the non-integration will not bring negative consequences to the societal inequities. Since women in Nigeria are allowed to attend schools at any level, and having education will give women the courage to protest/fight for any kind of opportunities to empower women. It further explains that our schools already have feminist moral concern on gender discrimination and other gender related abuses, thereby most of the abuses and discriminations against women are tackled by the institutions in Nigeria. While integrating the feminist values into the educational policy would be a duplication of women's values, as the school's curriculum and methodologies are more inclusive to cater to not only women but also people with disabilities. Therefore, allowing women to have full access to education would enable them to fight for their rights at any level, and that may fast-track the realization of national and international gender-related initiatives.

**Keywords:** Feminist, Integration, Moral Framework, Gender Discrimination, Educational Policy

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### **Introduction**

Feminism is a social and intellectual movement that seeks to address gender inequality and promote women's rights. However, feminist theories developed in Western societies have often been criticised for failing to adequately represent the experiences of women in Africa. African feminist scholars have therefore developed theoretical frameworks that reflect the cultural, historical, and socio-political realities of African societies.

African feminism emphasises the importance of contextualising gender struggles within African traditions, colonial history, and socio-economic structures. Unlike Western feminism, which frequently emphasises individual autonomy, African feminist thought often highlights communal relationships and collective well-being.

### **Conceptual and Historical Development of Feminism**

The term "Feminism" was derived from the Latin word "Femina", which means "woman", and was first used with regard to issues of equality and the women's rights movement (Raina, 2017). It presents a set of beliefs and ideas that belong to the broad social and political movement to achieve greater equality for women. As a governing ideology, feminism gives shape and direction to the women's movement and enables women to fight for their rights. The concept of feminism, however, has been defined differently by various scholars; nonetheless, one common thread that runs through most definitions is the quest and campaign for the protection of women's rights and gender equality. According to Stephen (2019), the words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new Women's Movement, which emerged in the late 1960s. Likewise, Raina (2017) believes that the idea behind feminism revolves around advocacy for equal rights and opportunities for all genders, as well as challenging the gender-based discrimination already in existence and dismantling patriarchal structures of domination. In various societies around the world, the patterns of women's oppression and subordination are believed to differ; consequently, different feminist groups have emerged at different times. However, the main goal of every group is to achieve gender equality (Tong, 2009). Feminism can be manifested in seven categories: i) liberal feminism, ii) Marxist feminism, iii) socialist feminism, iv) radical feminism, v) ecofeminism, vi) cultural feminism, vii) black feminism, and viii) postmodern feminism. Each ideology attempts to describe women's oppression, explain the causes and consequences, and suggest strategies for women's liberation. Feminists support a gender-based view of the state, which is based on the creation of a gender-neutral society (Anas & Aminu, 2025).

### **The Nigerian feminist movement.**

In Nigeria, as in other societies, there is, and there has always been, a women's movement—or more correctly, women's movements. These existed before, during, and after colonialism. Many of these may not fit into the conventional definition of a movement. Various forms of interest groups see themselves as movements. All of these serve interests in many ways to attempt to address inequalities between women and men in

society. While this is an acceptable criterion for minimising disagreements in the characterisation of women-based organisations, the reality is that there are still substantial differences in the forms of movements that call themselves 'women's movements'. Some 'movements' may or may not have clear objectives, mission, or vision but exist as ad hoc bodies, useful when the need arises but with little or no coordination, continuity, or sustainability. Some may be limited to specific local struggles.

In Nigeria, the oldest and largest women's movement can be said to be the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), founded in 1958. The Nigerian women's movement is an unarmed movement. It is non-confrontational. It is a movement for the progressive upliftment of women for motherhood, nationhood and development. This movement is 'at home' with the protection of our culture and tradition, as well as with the supremacy of men. It will not rock the boat. It essentially accepts what tradition has been and what religion sanctions (Awotwi, 2018).

There is no denying that some forms of feminist struggles existed in Nigeria before what was clearly acclaimed and identified openly as a feminist movement: Women in Nigeria (WIN). However, such struggles were largely undocumented. Feminism in Nigeria, in its present form—consistent, organised, with clear objectives and ideology—came into being with the inauguration, in 1983, of the organisation known as Women in Nigeria (WIN), following the 1982 national conference on the same theme. WIN was a direct outcome of the conference, envisioned as a feminist movement and named as such.

During its first ten years, WIN facilitated the development of many of the self-identified feminists in Nigeria today. WIN started off with a clearly stated rights-based approach to issues concerning women in Nigeria and was very clear on the issues of gender and social justice. However, one must always pay tribute to WIN as a training ground for the emergence of organised feminist struggles in Nigeria.

### **Core Causes of Feminism in Nigeria**

Feminism in Nigeria emerged as a direct response to deep-seated patriarchy, gender inequality, and the marginalisation of women in political, economic, and social spheres. Driven by cultural, religious, and colonial legacies, it aims to eliminate systemic oppression and ensure equal rights, with roots in historical activism such as the 1929 Women's War.

**Systemic Patriarchy and Cultural Norms:** Nigerian society is overwhelmingly patriarchal, with cultural norms often viewing women as inferior to men, treating them as property or subordinate to husbands and fathers.

**Economic and Political Marginalisation:** Women are underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles, despite contributing significantly to the economy, leading to severe economic disadvantages (70% of the poor in Nigeria are women).

**Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence:** High rates of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and the prevalence of practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) drive the demand for protection and rights.

**Colonial and Religious Influence:** The reinforcement of patriarchal structures during British colonial administration, combined with interpretations of religious doctrines, has restricted women's opportunities and mobility.

**Need for Legal Empowerment:** A major cause is the need to address the gap between formal legal rights and actual practice, where women often cannot access the same opportunities as men.

### **Key Achievements of the Feminist Movement in Nigeria**

According to Awotwi (2018), below are some of the key achievements recorded by the feminist movement in Nigeria; they are as follows:

#### **a. Political Mobilisation and Representation:**

1. **Historical Impact:** Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) in the 1940s forced the abdication of a traditional ruler (the Alake of Egbaland) and achieved the abolition of special taxes on women.

2. **Independence Era:** Activists such as Margaret Ekpo and Hajia Sawaba championed women's voting rights, leading to universal adult suffrage in 1960.

3. **Legal Victories:** In April 2022, a Federal High Court in Abuja ruled in favour of women's inclusion in political processes, a significant milestone for female representation.

4. **Women in High Office:** The movement has pushed for women in top positions, including Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (first female Director-General of the WTO and first female Finance Minister) and Oby Ezekwesili (co-founder of Bring Back Our Girls).

#### **b. Social Justice and Activism**

1. **Anti-Violence Campaigns:** The 'Me Too' and 'No More' campaigns, along with efforts by feminists like Ireti Bakare-Yusuf, have brought attention to sexual abuse and impunity, aiding in the establishment of the country's first sex offender registry.

2. **Activism:** The "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign (2014) and the Feminist Coalition's role in the 2020 EndSARS protests, led by women such as Odunayo Eweniyi and Damilola Odufuwa, showcased the power of modern feminist collective action.

3. **Awareness Revolution:** Blogs and social media have been used to educate people about gender equality, challenging misogynistic laws and harmful cultural practices.

4. **Media and Cultural Influence:** Authors such as Chimamanda Adichie and activists like Kiki Mordi (Sex for Grades documentary) have reshaped the Nigerian narrative on feminism, bringing global attention to gender issues in education and professional spaces.

**c. Institutionalising the Movement:**

1. **WIN and NFF:** The creation of formal organisations like Women in Nigeria (WIN) in 1983 and the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) in 2008 has provided a structured approach to advocacy, research, and policy lobbying.

2. **Policy Advocacy:** Feminist groups have successfully engaged with state mechanisms to challenge policies such as forced virginity testing in universities and attempts to restrict women's rights.

**d. Empowerment and Career Advancement:**

1. **Breaking Barriers:** Women have made strides in male-dominated industries, such as Kafayat Sanni, the first female fighter pilot in the Nigerian Air Force.

2. **Financial Independence:** Advocacy has accelerated economic empowerment for women, promoted girls' education, and increased the number of women in the formal workforce.

**e. Legislative Advocacy:**

1. Feminist organisations have been instrumental in advocating for the passage of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) at both the federal and state levels, aiming to curb domestic violence and harmful traditional practices.

2. Despite these achievements, the movement continues to tackle high rates of maternal mortality, low female parliamentary representation, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms (Awotwi, 2018).

**What is the Feminist Moral Framework in Education?**

A feminist moral framework in education is an approach to teaching and learning that critiques traditional, male-centred educational structures and promotes equality, care, and the dismantling of patriarchal power dynamics. It moves beyond merely ensuring equal

access to education to challenging the hidden curriculum, teaching methods, and institutional norms that devalue marginalised voices and reinforce gendered stereotypes (Lindemann, 2005).

### **Tenets of a feminist moral framework**

The following are some of the tenets of the feminist moral framework:

1. Critique of Androcentrism: It identifies and corrects the "male stream" perspective that treats male experiences as the human norm.
2. Ethic of Care: Inspired by theorists such as Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan, this framework prioritises relationships, empathy, and interdependence over competition and abstract rules.
3. Intersectionality recognises that gender, race, class, and sexuality intersect, and therefore seeks to support all marginalised students, not only those privileged by race or class.
4. Democratic Pedagogy: It fosters a non-authoritative classroom climate that is participatory, nurturing, and validates personal experience, breaking down the hierarchy where teachers hold all the power.
5. Social Justice and Action: It encourages learners to think critically about power, identify inequalities, and take action for social transformation.

### **Practical Applications in Education**

The following are practical ways of applying a feminist moral framework in education:

1. Curriculum Audit: Auditing educational materials to ensure balanced representation of women and diverse perspectives, while challenging the hidden curriculum that favours male voices.
2. Classroom Dynamics: Creating a 'care-full' pedagogy in which students are encouraged to be responsible for themselves and others, thereby reducing the pressure to be constantly competitive.
3. Activist Projects: Incorporating activist projects that encourage students to recognise and combat sexism, racism, and homophobia.
4. Teacher-Student Relationships: Building democratic, nurturing environments rather than maintaining a strict, authoritative structure (Babatunde, 2025).

By applying this framework, education becomes a "practice of freedom," as described by bell hooks, enabling students to "critique social conditions and understand how their gender, race, sexuality or class affects their personal, work and social lives."

By the practical application of a feminist moral framework in education, one may carefully observe that the system of operations in our schools involves inclusiveness, i.e. addressing gender issues. Nowadays, our classrooms contain physically challenged individuals and other forms of individual abnormalities, enabling all learners to feel like brothers' keepers and understand their differences. Our methodologies in classes involve general methods that cater to all learners' needs and democratic participation in teaching and learning, as well as dress codes to address issues of sexual attraction, harassment, and sex for grades. Mutual and positive student-teacher relationships exist. Enrolment at all levels has changed in favour of women, with most classes in schools containing more females than males. On the other hand, females are elected to the offices of student representative councils. All these indicate the inclusion of a feminist moral framework in Nigerian schools.

#### **No Need to Integrate a Feminist Moral Framework into Nigerian Educational Policy.**

According to Stephen (2019), feminism is a quest and campaign for the protection of women's rights and for gender equality. Raina (2017) believes that the idea behind feminism revolves around advocacy for equal rights and opportunities for all genders, as well as challenging gender-based discrimination and dismantling patriarchal structures of domination. The different feminist groups that emerged at various times, from liberal feminism to postmodern feminism, were initiated by educated individuals who acquired their education through different school settings. Education is a causal factor in the feminist movement worldwide.

In Nigeria, the movement began around 1958 with the emergence of the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), but the feminist movement was formally established with the inauguration of Women in Nigeria (WIN) in 1983, focusing on gender issues, social justice, women's conditions, and violence against women. Later, it was rebranded as the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF), which was more coherent than WIN.

For someone to gain relevance at any point of undertaking and interaction in society, one has to be educated. Education equips individuals to climb the highest rungs of the ladder at any given time and in any situation. Therefore, all the aforementioned women's struggles and achievements in Nigeria have resulted from the education of women, and women gain education through schools. Whether we integrate a feminist moral framework into our educational policy or not, as long as women are allowed access to education at all levels of schooling, it will equip and enable them to fight and protest for

their rights. Consequently, the position of this paper strongly criticises the integration of a feminist moral framework into educational policy. Evidently, the non-integration of a feminist moral framework in educational policy will not affect women's struggles in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

The Nigerian feminist movement represents an important intellectual effort to reinterpret gender relations within Nigerian cultural and historical contexts. Therefore, the non-integration of a feminist moral framework in our educational policy will not affect the feminist movement in Nigeria. The feminist movement in Nigeria will continue to struggle and protest for women's rights at all levels and address the specific experiences of Nigerian women, provided women are allowed access to their rightful education.

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