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The Methodology

This chapter describes the theoretical framework that undergirds the study reported in this book, and the research tools that were employed for data collection and analyses.

Theoretical Framework

One broad theory that takes a full view of the character of the teaching-learning process in schools; what is taught, the hidden curriculum and the effect of religion on the formation of consciousness, and the cumulative effect of all these on the female identity, is the feminist pedagogy. This theory has a vision of what education might be, but is frequently not. Feminist pedagogy, according to Schrewsbury (1998), is

a theory about the teaching-learning process, that guides our choice of classroom practices, by providing criteria to evaluate specific education strategies and techniques.... The evaluative criteria include the extent to which a community of learners is empowered to act responsibly toward one another and the subject matter and to apply that learning to social action (p. 167).

Feminist pedagogy focuses on the experiences and, in particular, the oppression of women in the context of education (Merriam and Cafarella 1999).

Two models of feminist pedagogy have been pulled out of the many strands of feminist pedagogies. They are the liberatory and the gender models. The liberatory model is said to draw from structuralist, postmodernist, Marxist and critical theories. It is the view that institutions of learning and the classroom itself reproduce the power structure that is found in the larger society, and so, liberatory feminist educators 'attempt' to recover women's voices, experiences and viewpoints, and use these to make systems of privilege, power and oppression visible. They also pay attention to the structured nature of power relations and interlocking systems of oppression based on gender, race and class, which

are reinforced by education (Merriam and Caffarella 1999). In the gender model, attention is on how female identity has been socially constructed to be one of nurturer and how the individual woman can find her voice, becoming emancipated in the personal psychological sense. Educators therefore look at how the educational environment and the learning transaction can be constructed, so as to foster women's learning. In this model, a connected approach to learning is advocated, where life experiences are valued, where a woman can have a voice, and hence an identity.

Merriam and Caffarella indicated that Tisdell identified four recurring themes in feminist pedagogy: how knowledge is constructed; the development of voice; the authority of the teacher and students; and dealing with difference. They also observed that Tisdell found the liberatory model to be strong on differences based on race, class and gender, although she also thought they focused too much on structures, and did not account for the individual's capacity for agency, the capacity to have some control outside the social structure. Tisdell thought that the gender model, on the other hand, tended to emphasize similarities among women and did not take account of differences in power relations based on class, race, sexual orientation, etc. Tisdell further indicated that the way to take account of the recurring themes in the feminist pedagogy literature was to have a post-structural feminist pedagogy, which synthesizes both the psychological model with the structural factors of the liberatory perspective.

It is from the post-structuralist feminist pedagogy framework that this study proceeds. This is because it appropriately addresses our concerns about: institutions of learning as some of the social institutions that reproduce the power structure in the larger society; power relation in the teaching-learning situation and the construction of female identity; women's internalization of these constructions; and, resistances to the constructions.

Finally, the vision of feminist pedagogy gives hope. It throws up the possibilities that formal education may, at some point, begin to serve women better because 'it ultimately seeks the transformation of the academy, and points toward steps, however small, that we can all take in each of our classrooms, to facilitate that transformation' (Shrewsbury 1998:168).

Research Method

This research was undertaken mainly from the qualitative perspective. Our strategy was a phenomenological reading of the problem of the low social status of Nigerian women. Bakare-Yusuf (2003a) made a strong case for a phenomenological reading of African women's everyday experiences. Drawing who drew from the phenomenology of embodied existence developed by Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, she opined that phenomenology 'seeks to analyze existence and lived experience outside of the distorting influence of

normative patterns of description' (p. 6). She indicated that it is through lived experience in concrete situations that an African woman, for instance, comes to understand what her context has contributed to her identity as an African woman; that a woman's lived experience alludes to the complex layers of socio-historical (personal and collective) and cultural context that makes an African woman who she is. The respondents in this study were therefore invited to take part in the identification of the processes that resulted in women's (especially literate women's) current low social position through the respondents' own lived experiences and the experiences of women around them. Fortunately, given the instruments that were used to retrieve information from respondents (interviews, open-ended questionnaires, observation and focus group discussions), respondents not only identified the processes that resulted in women's current social status, they shared their own understanding of the issues involved, and also proffered solutions to the problem of the low social status of Nigerian women.

Interviews were held with seven female and male lecturers selected from seven schools/faculties in two institutions of higher learning, the University of Ibadan, located in Ibadan, which is in Oyo State, in the south-western part of Nigeria and the Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, located in the area that is referred to as the Middle Belt, in the central part of Nigeria. The criteria for selecting lecturers for interviews at the two locations were, first, that the lecturers had to have been teaching for a minimum of six years; second, that they would be willing to grant the interview; and third, that they would probably be available for the interview. Nine female and male religious leaders, representing the three main religions in Nigeria, Christianity, Islam and Traditional Religion (the worship of Sango¹), were also interviewed in the two locations of the study. With the help of my research assistants and long-time inhabitants of both towns, we identified religious leaders who appeared to have the largest following (largest number of adherents), and who were also widely known.

Lecturers were asked: whether gender relations play any role in their analyses and illustrations during lectures; whether they take an interest in the totality of the development of their students; whether female students complain of sexual harassment, and/or that lecturers have tried to put them down; and, about the values that they take to class. Religious leaders were asked questions in relation to how they view women – who they are, what ought to be their interests, and their expected roles in the private and public spheres of life. Specifically, the religious leaders were asked to state the position of their religions on: women's participation in politics; the education of women in the Western sense; the leadership roles that women play in the different religions; and violence against women.

Except for a few of the interviewees who were passionate about the issues raised during the interview, and whose interviews lasted about two and a half

hours, most of the interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours and were recorded on tape. All the interviews were conducted in the English language, except the two with the traditional religionists that were conducted in the Yoruba language. Yoruba language is the language of the Yoruba people, who inhabit the south-western part of Nigeria.

Six open-ended questionnaires were designed, and administered to respondents who were selected through purposive and convenience sampling techniques. We targeted women and men in the formal sector of the economy who were graduates of tertiary institutions, and were journalists, lawyers, teachers, and civil servants in the two locations of the study; as well as women in the informal sector of the economy who were tailors, hairdressers and traders. We also targeted female and male students from the schools/faculties and departments from which we had selected lecturers that we interviewed in the two locations; and sought out the female apprentices of the women in the informal economy who had shown willingness and readiness to take part in the study. We had hoped that we would get a good mix of illiterate and semi-literate interviewees among the women who work in the informal economy and their apprentices. We then administered the questionnaires to persons in our target groups, who were willing and ready to respond to the questionnaires once we got to a media house, a state secretariat, a salon, the market place, etc.

The question may be asked: but why were semi-literate and illiterate men not sampled? The focus of this study was essentially literate women. However, having bracketed formal education, religion and informal learning in the quest to understand the processes that shape the identities of this group of women, we suspected that like female and male lecturers, male students probably had a role to play in shaping the identities of different groups of women whom they interacted with on a daily basis, for at least eight out of the twelve months of a year (while school was in session), and for at least eleven to twelve years of formal schooling that they had experienced. Literate men in formal work settings were sampled for the same reason and more. They continued to interact with literate women at work (and also out of work), at least eight hours a day, and for at least five days in a week, after at least fourteen years of formal schooling. Of course, this is not to say that semi-literate and illiterate men that highly literate women interacted with on a daily basis, especially outside formal schooling and formal work, did not contribute to shaping the identities of the women. On their own part, semi-literate/illiterate women were sampled because, first, we wanted to compare the identities that highly literate women who had had at least fourteen years of formal schooling favoured, with the identities favoured by semi-literate/illiterate women who had experienced only a few years of formal schooling, or had no experience of that setting at all. Second, we wanted to know whether a real difference existed in the empowering potential of the identity(ies) that highly literate and semi-literate/illiterate women favoured.

At the end of the data collection exercise, we were able to retrieve information from: forty-two women and twenty-nine men who worked in formal work settings as lawyers, journalists, civil servants and teachers; forty-six female and thirty-two male students in the two higher institutions of learning where lecturers had been interviewed; and fifty-six illiterate/semi-literate women and thirty-nine semi-literate female apprentices who worked (and were training) in the informal economy as hairdressers, tailors and traders. All the questionnaires basically asked the same kinds of questions from all respondents, but required that female respondents volunteer more detailed responses to some questions. The questionnaires for the four categories of women that were involved in this research asked detailed questions about their participation in politics; roles of women in the private and public spheres; women's experiences of violence; their advice to victims of violence; and the associations, organizations/groups to which they belong. Questions were raised about: how women think men see women; how women see themselves; how women are similar to, and different from other women and men; the benefits of higher education/apprenticeship training and the changes that should be effected in the two types of education; the role of religion in the individual's life; and the critical question of whether women will vote for women who aspire to the highest political offices at the federal and state levels of governance, and top leadership positions in groups that have male and female members.

All women and men who work in formal sector settings, and female and male students, completed the questionnaires by themselves. The researcher and two research assistants, one each in Ibadan and Lokoja, wrote the responses of the semi-literate women in the informal economy in their questionnaires. The interactions were actually interviews. One hairdresser, and an apprentice tailor, who is also a Junior Secondary School Three (JSS III) student, completed their questionnaires, and their responses were comprehensible, although with great difficulty. The interviews with semi-literate women in Ibadan were conducted mainly in the Yoruba language, which is the language of the majority of the people who reside in Ibadan. The people who reside in Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State are not homogeneous, as they comprise about twenty-one ethnic groups. However, it appears the languages of three groups (Igala, Okun and Egbira Okene) are widely spoken. Fortunately, the research assistant in Lokoja is an Igala, the one at the Ibadan end of the research is Yoruba and, this researcher is an Okun who speaks Yoruba well. All three conducted the interviews with semi-literate women in Lokoja in Pidgin English, Yoruba and Igala, depending on which of the three languages the interviewee was comfortable with and the languages that the interviewers could handle.

We observed the interactions of: two lecturers with their students in class, and three female religious leaders during interactions with adherents of their religions. The observation of lectures took cognizance of the teaching-learning

environment, the teaching methodology, the responses of students to the lectures, who was responding the most, and how the students related to one another and to their lecturers in class. At the end of one of the lectures, the lecturer introduced us to her students, and asked whether I would like to speak with them. I spoke to them about my research, which was the reason I was in their class on observation. I implored the few that would be called upon to complete the questionnaires to do so truthfully, and I also raised the matter of the noticeable silence of the female students whenever the lecturer asked questions, and she did ask a lot of questions. The observation of the interactions of religious leaders with adherents paid attention to the message that was being passed on, and how the message was received by the adherents, that is, the expression on their faces, signs of agreement/disagreement, etc. We were not unobtrusive observers at those interactions.

In five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), four with all groups of women in Lokoja, and one with female apprentices in Ibadan, we explored the Appreciative Inquiry '4 – D' Cycle. In the groups, we: identified individual participants' strengths, assets, talents, and their contributions to a successful group project; and, got participants to envision who and what they (personal) and other Nigerian women (collective) would be in future. We moved to the design stage, which is about planning and also got promises from members of groups about linking up with one another to act on their dreams and visions (the delivery stage) in future. The FGDs had between five and nine participants, lasted between one and one and a half hours and they were recorded on tape.

Apart from primary data that were retrieved from respondents as indicated above, also available were: audio and video cassettes of the sermons of a Christian female religious leader who I could not observe; and secondary sources of data, such as books, journals, magazines and programme pamphlets that some well-meaning respondents gave to me in the course of collection of data. All the data, except the observation of a retired female professor who is also a religious leader, were collected in the second half of the year 2004. The observation of the professor took place in March 2005.

The Respondents

Most of the women in formal work were married (only four were unmarried), and were between the age bracket 30 to 39. There were a few others in the other age brackets – 20 to 29, 40 to 49, while only one respondent was above 50. Seven women, six of whom were from Ibadan and one from Lokoja possessed Masters degrees. Only one woman possessed the Higher National Diploma (HND) while three possessed the National Certificate in Education (NCE). All the four who held the NCE and HND certificates were from the Lokoja end of the research. All others in both Ibadan and Lokoja possessed Bachelors degrees.

Most female students and female apprentices were unmarried, and only a few were above age 30. Most were in their early twenties. Among female apprentices in Lokoja, half of the respondents were less than 20 years. The difference in age between apprentices in Ibadan and Lokoja is traceable to the fact that half of the apprentices in Ibadan were in school up to Senior Secondary School, whereas half of those in Lokoja were already out of school after primary education or Junior Secondary School education.

Among women in informal work and female apprentices, most were semi-literates. Some could read but could not write, but most said they were unable to read and write, despite the fact that they had been in school. Four out of 56 women in the informal economy could read and write with understanding. Seven in the same category had never been to school. The researcher was going to analyse data for the three groups represented in informal work, but it was discovered that there were not many differences in the responses of the three groups.

Following from these, we refer to women in the informal economy and female apprentices as semi-literate women, and sometimes, illiterate/semi-literate women, while women in formal work and female students are referred to as literate and, sometimes, highly literate women.

Most (42) of the women in the informal economy were married; five were single parents, two from Ibadan and three from Lokoja; and eight were single, five from Ibadan and three from Lokoja. The women were between ages 20 and 39. Nine were between ages 40 and 49, while three were above 50.

Like female students, most male students were not married, and were between ages 20 and 29. Most of the men selected from formal work settings were married. Four were single, and one was a single parent. Most of them were between the age range of 30 and 39. Five were above age 50, and one below age 30. Five of them possessed the Masters degree while one possessed the HND. The rest were Bachelors degree holders.

The question may be asked: why the decision to label journalists, lawyers, teachers and civil servants who work in formal settings as literate/highly literate, and tailors, hairdressers and traders, who work in the informal economy as illiterates/semi-literates? The reason is linked to the key question that was raised in the introductory part of this book, which is: why has the social, political and cultural status of highly literate Nigerian women not improved in spite of their education when their status is compared with that of men?

Some conceptual clarifications are required here. We will then tie them up with the key question that we are trying to answer in this book. The definition of a literate person that I would like to adopt is: someone who possesses the ability to read, write and perform basic numeracy tasks (Quigley 2005) with understanding, in either his/her mother tongue or an official language (that is, the language of formal institutions in one's context), and who is able to employ

those skills for functioning in daily activities. Conversely, an illiterate is someone who cannot read, write and perform basic numeracy tasks, in either his/her mother tongue or the official language of his/her context. Because I am interested in why the status of highly literate Nigerian women, women who are literate in the English language, have not matched that of men, I have adjusted the definition of literate and illiterate persons. A literate person is therefore someone who possesses the ability to read, write and perform basic numeracy tasks, with understanding, in the language of formal institutions in Nigeria (the English language), and who is able to employ those skills for functioning in daily activities. An illiterate is someone who is unable to read, write and conduct basic numeracy tasks in the English language.

The reason here is that it is through the English language that Nigerians interact with official institutions. If they were literate in their mother tongue alone, they would have to seek assistance from others, when interacting with officers of formal institutions, and this limits their autonomy and independence. Linked to this is the fact, for example, that the Nigerian Constitution prescribes a certain formal educational attainment or literacy level for persons seeking elective office, which is, a minimum of Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent. Equivalents include: Grade II Teachers Certificate, the City and Guild Certificate, ability to read and write, understand and communicate in the English language to the satisfaction of the Independent National Electoral Commission, the body responsible for conducting elections in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). The rights and wrongs of this constitutional requirement notwithstanding, its implication is that women who would like to occupy elective positions, for example, must possess some formal educational qualifications. At any rate, they have to be literate. In Nigeria, formal educational qualifications, recognized in formal institutions across states of the federation, are acquired in the English language. For the purpose of the study reported on in this book, we define a semi-literate person as a person who can: read in the English language but cannot write; only write his/her name/append his/her signature to documents; read and write but not with understanding, such that those limited skills cannot then be applied to a wide range of daily activities.

In this book, the terms illiterate, semi-literate and literate are therefore descriptors, and the possession, or a lack, of literacy skills is a mode of identification of the categories of respondents in the study reported on.

Identification of Participants in the Research and Analyses of Data

The research study reported on in this book, explores the processes that shape women's identities, and how the identities that result impact on women's power to become persons who are full citizens, through a phenomenological reading of their lived experiences. It therefore became imperative that certain processes of identification of participants be adopted, and also inevitable that one would

associate specific forms of identities (identities which the participants value and have self-identified) with the participants. So, one had to give participants names and initials, so as to be able to keep track of the beliefs, opinions, attitudes, voices and experiences of individual respondents and interviewees. The names and initials of all the respondents and interviewees in this book are therefore not real. However, the identities associated with them are real.

In addition, before data collection, some prospective interviewees, and institutions from which respondents and interviewees were going to be drawn, were wary of granting interviews and allowing the researcher access to prospective respondents and interviewees. Some of them made it clear that they did not want to be misquoted, and they did not want information they would provide mangled. They asked the researcher to write formal requests for the interviews, which she did, after which she was given access to interviewees and respondents.

This accounts for why large portions of the interviews with religious leaders were reproduced verbatim in this book. At any rate, the purpose of the interviews with the religious leaders was to draw them out on their position, beliefs and teachings about the roles of women in the private and public spheres, their identities, their relationship with formal western education, and their leadership roles in the new religions. Reproducing those portions of the interviews that are relevant to this study on the pages of this book appears to serve the purpose. In addition, at the beginning of all the interview, there was an agreement reached between the researcher and the interviewee that we would pause the tape recorder when the interviewee did not want an opinion or information out in the open, in the public sphere. This was strictly adhered to, so even if an interviewee could identify himself or herself in this book, the views associated with him or her cannot be contradicted.

I am convinced that many of the respondents and interviewees were conscious of the process they were engaged in when they agreed to be interviewed, complete our questionnaires, and/or participate in focus group discussions. I therefore believe that many were forthright, but also strategic in their responses to my questions. I sensed that some of them used the opportunity of the interviews and completion of the questionnaires to comment on issues that were already in the public sphere that they thought they needed to: add their voices to; correct misrepresentations about; and provide information about. Again, in cases such as these, there were specific references to specific events and personalities in our history. I have taken out names of the personalities, if the reader's knowledge of the name would not add to an understanding of the subject.

Before fieldwork, the researcher assumed that because respondents in Lokoja resided in a multi-ethnic town, their responses might be different from those of respondents in Ibadan, as Ibadan was a predominantly Yoruba city. Analysis of data has not shown major disparities in results, hence the decision to draw inferences from results without reference to the location. There are references

to locations only when a real difference appears, or when a result displays the character of the location from where data were collected.

Quantitative analyses, mainly frequency of occurrence and percentile scores, were used only when we thought it would give a clearer picture of the point being made. Otherwise, we looked for the typical and atypical responses, and also looked out for slight deviations from both types of responses. We looked at relationships between sets of responses, even though attempts were made to avoid putting responses in straitjackets or neat categories. Just as we had suspected, we were able to pin most of the available data into the different traditions that are represented in the discourse of identity – essentialism, social constructionism, deconstructionism, and an eclecticism of two or all the traditions (Calhoun 1994; Mejiuni 2005). This is understandably so because women's identities, or the identities that women favour at different points in their lives, and that affect their view of their roles in the public and private spheres of life; all forms of violence on women and what to do about them; and the participation of women in political and community life, are, in reality, based on essentialism, social constructions, deconstructions and an eclecticism of the traditions.

I have tried to ensure that the real-life experiences and the voices of women who provided information for this research on the field are shared and heard. Concerning the experiences and voices of women, while some women appear silent, for they would not respond to some questions, and others appear to exaggerate their positions, I think the respondents were generally forthright. Even when some of the responses appear to contradict earlier positions, such can be a result of the dilemma that women face as a result of their social position and also due to the fact of the multiplicity of the identities that women inhabit.

In the chapters that follow, we look at the processes that have resulted in the present level of women's participation in civic-political affairs and the dominant discourse around women's experience of violence, and try to explore the possibilities that – that women will participate in civic-political affairs at the topmost levels in future; and that women will be able to resist and take decisive action against violence in future, in spite of, and/or because of their identities.

Note

1. According to Idowu (1962), Sango is one of the divinities (the Orisa) of Olodumare (God). It is believed that the Orisa were brought forth by Olodumare; they were His ministers, who look after the affairs of His universe and act as intermediaries between Him and the world of men. Idowu indicated that, to the believing, worshipping minds, the divinities are real, 'so real to the worshippers that they have, for practical purposes, almost become ends in themselves, instead of the means to an end, which, technically, they are according to Yoruba theology' (See E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*; Ikeja, Longman Nigeria Ltd, 1962:63, for more information about how Sango came to be associated with 'the wrath' of Olodumare).