GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICAN STATES

By

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Abstract

Gender equality and women empowerment in technical education for sustainable economic development in African states was a survey carried out in Benue state of Nigeria. 150 technical teachers out of total population of five hundred and seventy-six in fourteen technical colleges in Benue state were sampled. Respondents were sampled using cluster sampling technique from various sections. Data were collected through a well structured and administered questionnaire tagged Gender and Women Empowerment in Technical Education Questionnaire (GEWETEQ). Split-half technique and Crombach alpha reliability methods were adopted to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire item; a Crombach alpha coefficient of 0.81 was obtained. Mean and t-test were used in analyzing the data. The result of the study showed that people have the notion that only men could perform certain types of jobs like mechanical, civil, electronic engineering, etc; that status within the family as wife, mother and laborer restrict them from attending schools, especially technical schools, among others. The study recommended that every individual should be empowered educationally, irrespective of the area or sex as a right not a privilege. Any cultural practice which inhibits the women from full self-actualization should be abolished.

Women are critical agents for sustainable future and the society must fully recognize and use their potential. Gender equality and women’s empowerment constitute key ingredient for a sustainable future and economic development of any nation. The achievement of gender equality in technical education does not only benefit sustainable future, it also enables its realization and the achievement of the objective of Millennium Development Goals in the country.
Technology education is a programme designed to enable students explore career alternatives, support basic academic and life skills, and to enable them achieve high academic standard, leadership, preparation for industrial work and advanced continuing education. If women and girls imbibe the culture of technology and surrender themselves to be trained in various technical and vocational occupations, sustainable future development would be a reality. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) in the new National Policy on Education, described technical education as those aspects of the educational processes involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. According to Eze (2012) some of the objectives of this type of education include to:

1. Produce semi-skilled and technical manpower necessary to restore, revitalize, energize, operate and sustain the National economy and substantially reduce unemployment.
2. Serve as a means of national defence against poverty brought about by lack of job skills.
3. Reform the content of technical and vocational education to make it more responsive to the socio-economic need of the country.
4. Harmonize and inter-relate with industry and the labour market in term of resources for training as well as production standards.
5. Raise and sustain a generation of job creators rather than seekers.
6. Enhance access to Technical and Vocational Education system
7. Ensure equity of access, participation and completion rates.

Technical education has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of its impact on productive and economic development. Technical education is that aspect of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. It is a planned programme of courses (Metalwork Technology, Electrical/Electronics, Woodwork, fundamental of Technical Drawing, Applied mechanics, Automobile Technology, and Building construction) and learning experiences that begin with exploration of career options, support basic academic and life skills, and enable achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced and continuing education. Most students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria are daily confronted with challenges of coping with their academic work under serious emotional strains occasioned by different factors such as motivation and gender.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2001) defined gender as the social attitudes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationship between women and men, girls and boys as well as the relations between women and
men. Cotter (2004) saw gender as social attributes and opportunities in being female and male and the relationships between males and females. Nwokolo (2010) defined gender as the social roles allocated respectively to men and women in a particular society at a particular time. Such roles are conditioned by a variety of political, economical, ideological and cultural factors and are characterized in most societies by unequal power relations. Education, culture and religion shape male and female personalities differently, thus resulting to gender disparity.

Education can and has been used to minimize or address gender inequality toward women. Gender inequality and disparity in education are not recent phenomena. Gender equality is the state where in women have the same rights and entitlement as men in the society and its institutions and processes. In a state of gender equality, women are not discriminated against in any way. Gender equality, according to United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005) means that men and women should be equally valued by society regardless of their differences or the role they play, in other words it means men and women should be full partners everywhere they find themselves. Gender equality means that women and men have equal condition for realizing their full human rights and potentials and to contribute to national political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the result (The Commonwealth Plan of Action and Development, 1995). Equality is essential for human development and peace. Gender equality is the notion that men and women should enjoy similar benefits and outcomes accruing from their participation in society.

The concept of women’s equality is rooted in history, and has evolved in relation to changing social, economic and political conditions. Attaining gender equality demands a recognition that current social, economic, cultural and political systems are gendered; that women’s unequal status is systemic; that this pattern is further affected by race; ethnicity and disability; and that it is necessary to incorporate women’s specificity, priorities and values into all major social institutions (Commonwealth Plan of Action…).

Gender equality refers to the existence of different degrees of social, cultural, political, educational, economic, influence or prestige between women and men. The demand for gender equality therefore is on the need for equality in the treatment society accords to males and females in such areas as enjoyment of equal social status, human rights and responsibilities, social privileges and educational opportunities for male and female. These may enhance the restoration of peace and economic development in the society. Educational access, school enrolment and completion rates seem to favour the male gender. Promoting gender equality through women empowerment is seen as an encouragement to achieve greater economic development.
Empowerment, according to Nwokolo (2012) referred to the increase in the political, social and economic strength of an individual and communities. Empowerment is a process of transformation having to do with the economic, social, psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless (Aruma, 2011). Simply put, empowerment is stating that women should be allowed equal opportunity with their male counterpart in every area, and be given a good opportunity to contribute to societal development. A 50-50 opportunity for male and female will bring about gender equality and empowerment. Empowerment is a strategy that seeks to transform the structures of subordination through changes in legislature, property right, education and all those other institutions that reinforce and perpetuate total male dominance. It means raising the awareness and consideration of women towards acts and laws that are detrimental to their progress and survival (Okeke, 2011).

Considering the above definitions, one can say that women empowerment means giving women the authority and legal power to participate in the social, cultural, economical, educational and political fields of life without any hindrance. There is persuasive evidence that gender bias, gender segregation and gender discrimination exist and have a baneful effect on access to technical education in Nigeria, especially in the northern parts. Technical education has historically been characterized by a high degree of sex segregation. Access to non traditional school as well as technical schools was legally denied females. Many people have the notion that only men could perform certain types of jobs like mechanical, civil, electronic engineering, computer science/technology to mention a few. There are talented women who could academically excel in the area of science and technical education. If encouraged and appropriate educational environment is created for them. Barriers to equality are rooted in long-standing attitudes and traditions not only about women but also about race, age, sexual orientation, disability, colour, etc. Equality for all women will come about only as these attitudes embedded in the workplace, educational institutions and the family begin to change. This is the focus of this contemporary study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The study was designed to ascertain teacher’s perception of the strategies for improving gender equality in technical education for sustainable future and economic development.

Specifically, the study aims at the following:
1. To identify the problems that impede effective participation of women in technical education.
2. To ascertain the perception of teachers on the ways for improving gender equality in technical education.
Research Questions
The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:
1. What are the problems that impede effective participation of women in technical education in Nigeria?
2. What are the strategies to be adopted for the effective participation of women in technical education for sustainable future development?

Methodology
A descriptive survey research method was employed. The descriptive survey is a systematic way of collecting data and examining current situations in a given phenomena without any experimental method.

All technical teachers in the fourteen Technical Colleges in Benue State constituted the population. Presently, the total technical teachers in the technical colleges is five hundred and seventy six.

Sample
A representative sample made up of 150 technical teachers were drawn, using cluster sampling technique from various sections. The instrument for the study, tagged Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Technical Education Questionnaire (GEWETEC), was a structured 20-item questionnaire with four point modified Likert-type rating scale designed in order to obtain information from the respondents from each of the participating schools.

The validity of the instrument was established by three experts in this area, using Pearson Product Moment correlation, the reliability coefficient of 0.90 was obtained. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed with the help of three research assistants, to the respondents in the technical colleges. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions. All the scores that fell within and above the criterion mean of 2.50 were accepted, while those that fell below the criterion mean of 2.50 were rejected.

Results
The results of the study were presented in table 1 and 2 based on research questions.
Table 1: Mean Rating of Technical Teachers on the Problems that Impede Effective Participation of Women in Technical Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Inequality sources towards women</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Status within the family as wife, mother and labourer</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Early pregnancies in life</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male are more competent and industrious than their female counterparts</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>More males occupy the principal officess than their female counterparts.</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary assignment for women by culture is to bear and rear children, cook food and take care of home.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Families see girls as temporary members of the family</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Societies believe that it is an abomination to train girls in schools</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Some ethnic groups and religious organizations have it as a norm and value that women should not be seen in the public.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Women/girls should not mix up with the opposite sex</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Parents prefer giving out young girls as house-helps to families who can afford their education and feeding.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis presented in Table 1 showed the mean (X) and standard deviation scores of the respondents. The mean scores of technical teachers were greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 except item 4 which fell below 2.50. Other items with their mean scores greater than the criterion mean scores were accepted while item 4 was rejected by the respondents. The standard deviation (SD) also ranged from 0.68-1.45, indicating that their opinions are closely related.
Table 2: Mean Scores of Technical Teachers on the Strategies to Be Adopted to Enhance the Effective Participation of Women in Technical Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Giving women greater attention in all facets of their educational life</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Providing jobs for the female upon completion of their technical education programme.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Giving special incentives to women who are already in the career</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Employment of more female teachers to teach females in technical schools</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Early kindling of women’s interest in technical education by giving them scholarships and textbooks.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Full girl-child participation in technical education for self-reliance and empowerment,</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Adequate formal education for all by providing equal opportunities devoid of gender discrimination</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Assisting women develop skills to be creative and innovative</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Assisting women take firm steps to actualize their creative dream and visions.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>National Orientation Agency to engage in enlightment campaign to educate the populace on the importance of acquiring technical skills by women.</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results from table 2 revealed that the respondents found the listed items as essential measures for tackling the constraints that hindered effective participation of women in technical education programmes. Prominent among all were that the women should be given greater attention in all facets of their educational lives; providing jobs for females upon completion of their technical education programmes; giving special incentives to women who are already in the career.
Discussion of Findings

The respondents indicated that people have the notion that only men could perform certain types of jobs like mechanical, civil, electronic engineering, computer science/technology etc. that status within the family as wife, mother and labourer restricted them from attending schools, especially technical colleges. The findings of this study with regards to the early pregnancies revealed that the fear of early pregnancies by parents is one of the constraints to participate in technical education. This finding is in line with the findings of Ikekeonwu (2010) who stated that sexual and gender based violence continue to be significant obstacles to girls’ education, particularly for mature girls attempting to pursue secondary education. In addition, other constraints identified in the study are summarized as follows: more males occupy principal offices than their female counterparts. Primary assignment for women by culture is to bear and rear children, cook food and take care of home; families see girls as temporary members of the family. The finding is in line with that of Randell and Gergel (2010) who pointed out that gender socialization ensures that families invest the financial expense of education on their sons rather than daughters, based on the idea that education for the girls is a waste because eventually marriage is inevitable.

The data presented in table 2 provided the solution to the measures to be adopted to enhance effective participation of women to technical education. The respondents also agreed that the measures for effective participation of women in technical education include giving women greater attention in all facets of their educational lives; giving special incentive to women who are already enrolled in the programme. This agrees with Nwokolo (2010) who remarked that providing scholarships as an incentive for girls who show great potential in technical education discipline, should increase the interest of female students and enhance gender equality in technical education programme.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper emphasizes the need to address multiple aspects of problems from different angles especially the integration of strong gender perspectives in public policy making. These problems could be attributed to the socio-economic status of the parents, religious or culture, literacy level of the country, lack of adequate awareness campaign, etc.

Women are becoming more aware of their rights as contributors to economic development; therefore, they do not want to be marginalized in terms of technical education programmes. For Nigeria to experience serious development and active involvement of women in all facets of human endeavors there must be gender equality in access to, retention and completion of technical education, which equips individuals for employment and self-reliance. The society has to recognize the indispensable role
of women in moving the Nigerian society forward, the moment the notion of women being slaves or inferior to men is eradicated and the capable women and men are allowed to handle the affairs of the society where they fit in properly without gender bias or inequality, the better and quicker the development of the nation will be.

**Recommendations**

For effective participation of women in technical education programmes in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Every individual should be empowered educationally irrespective of the area as a right not a privilege.
2. Efforts should be made to remove all discriminatory practices against females with reference to religion and culture, since it affects their participation in technical education.
3. There should be no preference for the male child. All children born in a family should be given equal opportunities in all spheres of life endeavour.
4. Special scholarships should be awarded to girls reading technical education in tertiary institutions.
5. Parents should not impose courses on their children especially with particular reference to female.
6. Any cultural practice which inhibits the women from full self actualization should be abolished.
7. All stakeholders including the women folk should organize variety of technical and vocational training activities for skill development leading to employment for women and girls.
8. Women should be sufficiently empowered technically and in other relevant areas by the three tiers of government.
9. Workshop, seminars and conferences on the theme “Gender Equality in Technical Education and its Implications” should be periodically organized to sensitize the public on the meaning and problems associated with its and possible solution.
10. Awareness campaigns should be directed on men by the three tiers of government to enable them support and give encouragement to their wives to embark on technical skills acquisition.
References


