

Gender inequality in technical and vocational education and training: A challenge to female education in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper looks at the gender inequality in Technical and Vocational education and training (TVET) with respect to female education in Nigeria. It defined the concept of gender as socio cultural and is built based on the biological expectations of the individual on the basis of being male or female, and identifies wide range of gender issues militating against Technical and Vocational Education and training development such as religion, stereotype, lack of adequate guidance and counseling services and cultural influences. The paper also looks at ways of encouraging female participation in TVET in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper recommended among others that a massive public orientation campaign, to encourage parents, teachers and the public at large towards female education in general and Technical and Vocational Education and training in particular and a call for the removal and abolition of all socio-cultural, religious and political barriers inhibiting female education in general and Technical and Vocational Education and training in particular.

Keywords: Gender, Technical Vocational Education and Training, Challenge

Introduction

Education is known to hold the key to the advancement of human societies but this has remained a mirage to the female child in Nigeria. It is a truism that girls have been traditionally disadvantaged, with other teeming problems and obstacles that are still endangering the right of the girl child to education. The situation of gender equality all over the world is said to have made some progress. In spite of this, there still exists a gender gap in the educational sphere especially in technical and vocational education and training in Nigeria. With all the lofty objectives and the benefits of technical and vocational education and training, it has not been fully utilized. In the educational system, gender is important as it tends to influence the pattern of school enrolment. In most societies, gender role has relegated females to the background, preventing them

from participating in and benefitting from educational and development efforts. Thus, the society as a whole suffers from the marginalization and underutilization of half of its population (UNESCO, 1998). The opportunity cost of foregoing school for female children is very high due to the male roles and society preference for male children and that is why in some communities the female children are not sent to school like their male counterparts due to some cultural/religious practices. The principle of gender is to categorize human being according to biological differentiation. It allows the classification of human being according to being a male or female. Gender shapes the lives of all people in all societies. It influences all aspects of human lives. While gender is expressed differently in different societies, in no society do men and women perform equal roles or hold equal positions of power.

Culture and tradition has assigned occupations to males and females in the society, thus each sex has a role to play in areas considered exclusive for it. For instance, traditional, women are expected to be employed in such areas as teaching, nursing, clerical work and home making which is accorded lower status, lower pay and assumed to require less skill. On the other hand, men are assigned jobs which involve physical strains, logical thinking, leaderships and competition. In line with these findings, girls have consistently chosen to be secretaries, teachers and nurses. However, results of studies carried out by Kurumeh (2004) have showed that both males and females perform excellently in careers other than their traditional careers. Females are very excellent as pilots, lawyers, doctors, engineers, artists, scientists and males also excel as secretaries, nurses, caterers as well as teachers. Oganwu (1996) cited by Omoregie and Ihensekhien (2009) equally pointed out that Nigerian women and their counterparts in other African countries have been debased and dishonoured by the thought that every woman is supposed to consider motherhood as the principal purpose of her existence. She is expected to produce children, cook, mend and wash clothes and take care of men and be subordinate to male authority.

According to Omoregie and Ihensekhien (2009), there is still much gender inequality in Nigerian Education in spite of all steps taken by the Federal Government to give equal gender opportunity to education such as the provision of the Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and today, the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The female gender is still lacking behind in education and this has much implication in the social-economic status of the females in the nation. If drastic measures are not taken, education in Nigeria may be all male affairs as the females dominate the markets, the farms and the homes to make more babies and increase poverty in the land. Gender inequality between male and female has contributed to educational inequalities in terms of making career choices especially in technical and vocational education, where some courses are highly dominated by male at detriment of female and such has great implications not only on the education sector but the nation as a whole. The issue of

low participation of women in technical and vocational courses in our educational institutions has assumed prominence in technical and vocational education. Technical and vocational education is a type of education that leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills with scientific knowledge, for individuals to live well in the society and contribute meaningful to the nation's economic and technological development. The National Policy on Education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004) described technical and vocational as a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work, and indeed method of alleviating poverty. It is a type of education that makes the individual become a better, more useful and productive citizen and it promotes the dignity of labour by entrenching work as the goal of education. Technical and Vocational trades over the years and all over the world have been seen as predominantly dominated by male with very little female participation. The trade is believed to be too physical and strenuous for any woman to venture into it. However, a profession identified mostly with men tends to confer on women who venture into it a degree of respect.

Technical and Vocational education will therefore boost the ego of female students. In the study conducted by Eta (2000) on Dimension of Gender Crises in Nigerian Education, it was observed that there is a low enrolment of women in Technical and Vocational Courses such as Building Construction Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Electronics. This amounts to gender disparity and crises in this aspect of education. Also Osideinde (1999) reported that the gender ratio in the educational system indicates that males are more educated than females and it is clear that males are more in number than females in Technical and Vocational Education and training courses. He supported his argument by quoting Okorie (1998) who posited that there is gender gap in access to education and that women receive less education than men. He opined further that despite increase in enrolment at all levels of education, fewer girls participate in Technical and Vocational trade. However there is growing awareness for female education which stemmed from the widening gap in the enrolment of males and females in developing countries like Nigeria. What are the encumbrances preventing female enrolment into technical and vocational courses and what are the possible ways of balancing sex equity in this area of education. This paper therefore, looks at the concept of gender; emerging cases of gender inequality in Technical and Vocational Education and training as it affect female education in Nigeria and suggest recommendations for improvement.

The concept of gender

The term gender is socio-cultural and is built based on the biological expectations of the individual on the basis of being a male or female. Gender has sound psychological background and is used to refer to specific cultural patterns of behaviour that are attributed to human sexes. The term neither means males nor females but relates to cultural attributes of both males and females (Nnachi, 2007). Individuals are oriented

towards the type of behavior expected of them on the basis of being male or female. Oyedeji (2004) defined gender as roles, attitudes and values assigned by culture and society to men and women. These roles, attitudes and values define the behaviour of men and women and the relationship between them and are created and maintained by social institutions such as families, government, communities, schools, churches, mosques and media. Gender, then, refers to a set of assumptions about the nature and character of biological differences between males and females, assumptions that manifest in a number of ideas and practices that have a determinant influence on identity, social opportunities and life experiences of human actor (Taylor, 1994). These assumptions are developed and defined in context as they pertain to males and females. The assumptions tend to define the task and roles of a particular sex, thus enhancing role and behavioral identity for the individual. It could then influence what a person is expected to do or not. It also influences the person's believe in respect of being a male or female. For instance, it is a traditional belief that females rate their ability lower, especially, on stereotyped masculine tasks (Rosenfield and Stephan, 1978; Gitelson, (1982); Nnachi and Ubah, 2003). In actual sense there are traditional belief differences for the males and females. According to Agu (1995) there are different encouragement for boys and girls. Thus expectations tend to vary from one sex to another. Gender, then, could also refer to social roles, traditional expectations, cultural assumptions and beliefs about the nature and character of the biological differences between the human males and females. Equality in gender consideration refers to a situation of providing equal opportunity, equal justice, equal hearing and treatment to all the members of a social group irrespective of their sex. But if the consideration is tailored toward one sex, there is inequality.

Emerging cases of gender inequality in technical and vocational education and training

Available records of studies conducted by STAN (1992) and Denga (1993) attest that parent play a vital role in the counseling of their children toward Technical and Vocational Education related courses. In Nigeria, there exist social and cultural stereotypes concerning professions for women and men. Parents greatly influence the choice of field to study by boys and girls. There are some traditional roles assigned to males and females, for example our fore-fathers view of women generally is that, women should be loved, made to bear and care for babies and prepare meals for family and visitors. This assumption marks the beginning of the problem. However, there could be still other problems associated with the low participation of women in the technical and vocational education courses. These include religion, stereotype, lack of adequate guidance and counseling service, cultural influences, etc.

Gender stereotypes in school textbooks provide students with an insufficient or biased understanding about the world and some professions. The images and ideas presented in some school textbooks show women in traditional role and occupation in the home, on the farm and nursing mothers taking care of others and doing manual work. While

the boys and men were shown less traditional and unrestricted roles and occupations, as leaders, doctors, engineers, pilots, scholars, explorers and among others, the girls and women are shown traditional and restricted roles and occupations such as caterers, home makers, and nursing and among others. This gender stereotype has great influence on the field of study of boys and girls which greatly affects Technical and Vocational Educational and training development in Nigeria. Despite the recognition of the importance of Technical and Vocational Education by Federal Government, as it is enshrined in the National policy on education (FGN, 2004) as that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills, there is still inequality between women and men in the development of Technical and Vocational Education and training for national development. Elimination of sex bias and sex-role stereotyping is promoted through Technical and Vocational Education and training. Regardless of the attitude held by the society about the intellectual ability of women to work, it is clear that technical and vocational educators are concerned about delivering appropriate Technical and Vocational Education and training for girls and women and also believes in the dual preparation of women as wage earners and homemakers.

Technical and Vocational Education will reduce the problem of unemployment among women. Millions of women who are heads of families must work to support themselves and their dependants. Married women also must work because their husbands' pockets do not take care of basic family needs. Where families face poverty and deprivation, women's earnings often make a significant difference in the health and wellbeing of children. This is what Technical and Vocational Education and training is yearning for. Inequalities in the workplace are outcome of sex bias and sex role stereotyping; social customs are evident in a host of popular beliefs regarding what is women's work and what is men's work. However, there is considerable evidence to refute popular beliefs and it is well to consider the process by which old beliefs persist. Klevit and Bach (1996) points out that, stereotype is powerful in serving as a screen to observations of reality. Whenever stereotype or belief is confirmed in the behaviour of any female member of the society, the belief is confirmed and strengthened. But when the behaviour of a male member of a group is contrary to the belief, it is likely to be "screened out" (i.e. unnoticed). Technical and Vocational Educators need to be activist in refuting popular belief regarding stereotyping. It is through this role that sex bias and sex-role stereotyping can be reduced. People have being frustrated and confused because the clear cut definitions of men's and women's responsibilities of the past are incompatible with the realities of contemporary living. The assumption that the world of work is a man's world, while home is a woman's domain is losing credibility. This notion is disclaimed by angry feminists, and it is inconsistent with what is happening in early half of the nation's home. Home management is a part time job for a substantial portion of adult Nigerians, male and female. Increasing members of women are entering into the labour force and husbands with wives are functioning in the dual role of home maker and wage earner.

This paper is therefore of the view that Technical and Vocational Education has been a determining factor in human history since time immemorial, contributing to economic competitiveness on a global scale and providing essential services, infrastructure, and among others currently. The gender disparities in Technical and Vocational Education and training are unacceptable; we need to address this imbalance proactively, in order to enhance the equal contributions of both male and female to national development. Since family has most intimate contact with the child during his/her formative years, and at least subsequent contact, it plays an exceptionally important role in determining the behavioral pattern as well as the choice or type of carrier or profession a child will eventually choose. Some parents always prefer that their children take after their professions for example law, journalism, medicine and engineering. Girls, the female gender are most often discouraged from participating in Technical and Vocational related professions. There is a prevailing attitude of hostility and cynicism towards the female gender (women who are interested in taking technical and vocational related occupations). This is an unhealthy development capable of causing alienation among the women folk.

Religion is viewed as moral teachings that mold and shape our conduct. Kelly, (1984) viewed Islam as a force against women education; it frowns at the competition of women with men hence it discourages female gender from participating in technical and vocational courses. According to STAN (1992), a good number of students surveyed agreed that superstition and traditional beliefs prevent females from participating in technical and vocational education professions by lowering their aspirations. Furthermore, there is a general believe that some roles or jobs are only suitable for men and not women.

Ways of encouraging females' participation in technical and vocational education and training

The low level of women participation in technical and vocational education activities is due to the attitude of female to the education. It is imperative that steps be taken to ensure full participation of girls to the programs because most of them are scared of Technical and Vocational Education and training as well as other related science subjects. The spread of Technical and Vocational Education and training will reduce the unemployment labour force. The promotion of such policy among girls and women who form slightly more than 50% of the potential labour force will guarantee expanded employment opportunities for the female. The involvement of female students in school and home maintenance provides an avenue for the development of technology culture. This also serves as a practical demonstration of the theoretical knowledge picked up in the classroom situations. This will surely have a positive impact on female participants in Technical and Vocational Education and training in Nigeria.

The importance of guidance and counseling in our school cannot be over emphasized. The issue of lack of career and guidance counselors in our schools has become worrisome over the years with the misconceptions from various quarters that Technical and Vocational related professions are meant for men. This negative attitude creates lack of self-confidence among the female gender. Girls usually underestimate their potential for understanding and succeeding in technical and vocational education courses. The inclusion of guidance and counseling programs in our universities as a core course for all teachers can go a long way in solving the problem of lack of guidance and counseling services in our schools, this will further enhance the participation of women in technical and vocational education courses.

Conclusion

The need for education and the advantages associated with being educated as a woman are enormous. An uneducated person can hardly equate with a well-educated one within the intellectual arena and in the social world. Exercise of inequality in the treatment of boys and girls in matters of Technical and Vocational Education and Training has demonstrated itself in the very low enrolment of males and females in our Technical and Vocational Institutions. The situation could be socially and intellectually catastrophic if permitted to perpetrate. The government, the school system and the society should join hands in eliminating inequality in the current treatment of girls in matters of Technical and Vocational Education and training. The school system should rise up to the challenges of ensuring gender equality in Technical and Vocational Education and training. In Nigeria, many women could hardly boast of any economic power without men. Unfortunately the bulk of women's work remains unnoticed. The access of women to economic power is unequal to that of men. Also, the participation of women in productive activities is so low. There is hardly any society that can survive without the support of women. Therefore, the importance of female participation in Technical and Vocational Education and training cannot be wished away.

Recommendations

1. A massive public orientation campaign, to encourage parents, teachers and the public at large towards female education in general and Technical and Vocational Education and training in particular.
2. There is need to set up a body of women association made up mainly of those who have embraced careers in Technical and Vocational Education and training to educate young girls on the prospects of career development in Technical and Vocational Education and other science related subjects which resulted into gender stereotyping is baseless.

3. There should be a comprehensive training on gender problems which may be incorporated in the Technical and Vocational Training Institutions curriculum.
4. A call by all women on government, for the removal and abolition of all socio-cultural, religious and political barriers inhibiting female education in general, and Technical and Vocational Education in particular.
5. The state and federal government should intensify effort through the ministry of women affairs women liberation movements to educate parents on the various opportunities available to girls who excel in Technical and Vocational Education and training so as to sensitize them to developing positive disposition to the sciences.
6. The federal and state governments should put in place a prize to be awarded to feminine gender who excels or who have generated great impetus and significant contribution to the development of Technical and Vocational Education and training at all levels of education.
7. More guidance and counseling personnel are engaged in our schools to carry out counseling services at various school levels.
8. Women should be encouraged through the provisions of special privileges during admission periods.

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