

Gender Equality Consciousness and Female Learners' Participation in Vocational Education in Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated gender equality consciousness and female learners' participation in vocational education in Enugu State College of Education Technical, Enugu, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of the study, one null hypothesis was formulated and tested. The research design used was survey design. The sample of the study comprised 380 female learners selected from four schools using simple and accidental random sampling techniques. An instrument designed by the researchers named "Gender Equality Consciousness and Female Learners Questionnaire" (GECFLQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated and the reliability estimate, using Cronbach Alpha coefficient method, ranged from 0.72 to 0.79. One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 Alpha level. The result shows that gender equality consciousness has significant influence on female learners' participation in vocational education. Based on the result, recommendations were made, among others, that government should provide good learning environment and necessary educational facilities to female learners who are into vocational education programmes.

Keywords: Gender, equality, female, learners, vocational, education

Introduction

Gender equality is the state of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviour, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Gender equality, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. Different roles and behaviour of female and male children, as well as adults are shaped and reinforced by gender norms within the society. These are social expectations that define appropriate behaviour, which often create inequalities

in which one gender becomes empowered to the disadvantage of the other. In many societies, women are viewed as subordinate to men and have a lower social status thus allowing men to exercise control over them in terms of decision-making. On the other hand, gender equality is expressed as fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. Programmes and policies that specifically empower women are often needed to achieve this.

Gender inequalities have a large and wide-range impact on society. This can contribute to gender inequalities in health and access to health care, level of income, opportunities for employment and promotion, political participation and representation, and even education (World Health Organization, 2001). Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are in a subordinate position (particularly at the community and household levels) and male children are preferred over female. The influence of the mother and the father is particularly significant in shaping and perpetrating patriarchy. The mother provides the role model for daughters, while the father demonstrates to sons what it means to 'be a man' (World Bank, 2005).

As in other male dominated societies, the social relations and activities of Nigerian women and men are governed by patriarchal systems of socialization and cultural practices which favour the interests of men above those of women. Consequently, a high percentage of women's employment is restricted to low income-generating activities, informal sector, which are not adequately represented in the national accounting systems (NAS). By comparison, men employed within the informal sector are located in the upper levels and are predominantly engaged in higher income-generating activities. The need to support initiatives that ensure financial independence for women is a critical step for mainstreaming gender into governance, especially with respect to politics and public life in order to liberate Nigeria's human capital resources for active participation in the vision for free market economy (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2006). The development of any nation requires the collective efforts of its citizens and all residents. More importantly, to achieve national development, both male and female members of the society need to be active participants. The world conference on education for all (EFA) held in Geneva in 2000 stressed the need for gender equity in education (Education for All Monitoring Global Report, 2013). The Beijing conference of 1995, the Millennium development goals (MDGS) of 2005 and the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 5512 also emphasized gender equity. Similarly in Nigeria, the National Policy on Education acknowledges the need for equality in educational opportunities for girls and boys (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). More so, gender equity is a major issue in the ongoing reform programme embarked upon by the federal government of Nigeria and it is designed to address gender imbalance in education. The gender composition

of occupancy in both the formal and the informal sectors of a country is important indicators of the economic opportunities open to women. According to Salman, Olawoye and Yahaya (2011), the participating levels of individuals in each sector could be determined by the enrolment of males and females in schools and their participation in certain school subjects and career.

Female participation in vocational education receives attention in Nigeria's most recent vocational innovation and technology policy, but no specific objectives have been developed (National Commission for Mass Literacy for Adult and National Education (NMEC), 2017). This is due to a lack of awareness in Nigeria on the problem of the vocational education gender gap and the important of girls and women's participation in vocational education. Future developments of societies are dependent on providing a high quality vocational education for all.

However, Achunine (2007) asserted that girl-child education is a powerful force of development particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where social welfare and economic advancement are constrained by population growth and a weakly developed human resource base, especially in the area of vocational education. Also, empowering women intellectually, socially and politically using education as a tool can be achieved through improved enrollment of female gender in schools in general and vocational education in particular.

It is very important to cultivate interest in vocational education among girls and to affirm from an early age that vocation belongs to them as much as to boys. However, research on adult females and males engagement in the vocational education reveals that disparity in participation and interest in vocation tend to widen as students transit to higher levels of education. In many African countries, women's transition into secondary schools is in a lower number than boys, as girls enroll in fewer vocational education classes. Notably, those women who study vocational education at the university level are less likely than men to concentrate on vocational education.

Vocational education is a compulsory component of the primary school Curriculum; here girls' participation is not yet an issue. It is at this level that gender disparity in interest and academic performance began to emerge in Nigeria and other countries. Early vocational education particularly in primary school, is of immense importance; this is because acquisition of vocational education skills that occurs in early childhood and primary schools serves as the foundation for the future learning (Achunine, 2007). At this stage, children have the greatest opportunity to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive skills that can lead to greater achievement later in life. Similarly, research on brain development by Schiller and Smart (2012) showed that the thinking skills

necessary for problem solving are best developed between the ages of four and twelve; this period coincides with primary school.

Education has been universally accepted as a catalyst for social, economic and technological development. In fact, no nation, which aspires to greatness, will easily neglect the need for the provision of education to all its citizens. Vocational education remains a vitals form of education that serves as foundations for the development of small and medium scale business, which is the launching pad for an industrial economy. According to Alam (2008) in Ali and Muhammed (2013), the knowledge of vocational skills is the prime mover of economic and social development of any nation; therefore, investment in human capital is an investment for the future of any country. Education and training could be regarded as bedrocks for improvement and have to be problems oriented, person centered, community centered, and should be able to cater for social problems which include unemployment, crimes, poverty, drug abuse etc. Skills enable the youths to be prepared for work in formal and informal sectors of the economy, and thus play important role in creating employment opportunities.

Vocational education is conceived to mean the provision of relevant and functional education, which would lead to acquisition of practical and applied creative skills. It allows the individuals to be productive and resourceful, so as to make progressive contributions to societal development. Nnabua (1996) listed some pre-vocational subjects to include woodwork, metal work, electronics, mechanics, local crafts, home economics and business studies. As noted by Arikpo in Agbara, Chagbe and Achi (2018), vocational education is that training which helps Nigerians to gain the needed skills and know-how for occupations.

Omoruyi and Osunde (2004) in further contributing to the advantages of vocational education, assert that, it is capable of ensuring gainful employment opportunities to other members of the society. It is pertinent to note that vocational education is a matchless and dynamic human resources development field of study. Dokubo (2010) revealed that numerous studies have shed more light on the relevance of vocational education programs on the empowerment of rural adults and poverty education in Rivers State.

Gender is contemporary issue in educational and psychological literature. This informed its inclusion in the new reforms initiative, which specifically addresses the need to remove disparities that put the girl-child at a disadvantage position (Adeyegbe, 2000). The improved awareness of the significant role of education has brought about some increase in school enrollment and literacy level of girls, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. However, Kolawole and Adepoju (2007) remarked that vocational education is the ability to use one's skills gainfully and

display one's intellectual and economic horizon well enough to be able to effectively manage the many economic problems confronting individuals and the country as a whole. Vocational education, according to Arikpo (2007), is that education which assists Nigerians to acquire the necessary skills and competence for occupation. Hodges (2000) states that there is serious gender bias, in terms of education, against girls in Nigeria, especially in northern part of Nigeria. He further stressed that 47% of girls aged 6 to 15 years are enrolled in schools compared with 63% boys. A lot have been reported on the low enrolment and attendance of females in vocational and technical education. Women and girls no doubts, are the most influential but often neglected group in most African societies. This neglect, to a large extent, has made women one of the most disadvantaged groups in developing countries of the world, where they are marginalized on account of gender, social and cultural bias, as well as other stereotypes (UNESCO, 1992).

However, Imarhigbe (1992) while documenting on the state of vocational and technical education institutions in Nigeria reported the lack of tools, equipment and infrastructure in some institutions. The teaching and learning environment has remained the same after so many years in many schools, while the existing equipment are fast getting worn out, in spite of the growing need for vocational and technical education. There is also the lack of modern library complex, workshop etc to support vocational education.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education in Enugu State College of Education Technical, Enugu, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education

Research hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education.

Methodology

Survey design was adopted for this study. This design was appropriate for the study because it is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions, as it exists at the time of investigation (Isangedighi, Joshua, Asim & Ekuri, 2004). The target population of this study comprised 760 female learners' in the Enugu State College of Education Technical. The sample of this study consisted of 380 female learners; simple and accidental random sampling

techniques were used in selecting the respondents to participate in the study. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Gender Equality Consciousness and Female Learners Questionnaire (GECFLQ) designed by the researchers. The instrument had two sections, A and B section. A contained respondents' demographic information such as sex, age, name of departments and faculty. While section B had 20 items in the form of modified four point Likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with scores 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The instrument was duly validated by two experts in Adult and Continuing Education and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test with coefficients that ranged from 0.72 to 0.79. This was established after administering copies of the questionnaire to respondents who were not part of the study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the subjects and collected by the researchers on the spot. The data collected were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The hypothesis was tested at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is gender equality consciousness while dependent variable is female learners' participation in vocational education. To test this hypothesis, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. Result of the analysis in Table 1 revealed that calculated F-ratio of 97.305 is greater than the critical f-ratio of 3.03 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 377 degrees of freedom. This means that, there is a significant influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected hence the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Since the results showed significant influence, a post hoc comparison test among group means was carried out to determine the pair-wise mean difference responsible for the significance influence. Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) method was used in carrying out the test. Results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Summary of one-way ANOVA of the influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education

Gender equality consciousness	N	Mean	SD
Lowly	158	12.16	2.715
Averagely	86	13.67	1.943
Highly	136	17.60	4.584
Total	380	14.45	4.155

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F
Between group	2227.262	2	1113.631	97.305*
Within group	4314.685	377	11.445	
Total	6541.947	379		

Significant at 0.05 level, $df = 2 \text{ \& } 377$; critical $F = 3.03$.

Result of Fisher's test analysis in Table 2 shows significant pair-wise comparison group mean differences as follows: lowly conscious versus averagely conscious ($t = 3.32$; $p < 0.05$), lowly conscious versus highly conscious ($t = 13.730$; $p < 0.05$), and averagely conscious versus highly conscious ($t = 8.414$; $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that respondents who were highly conscious in gender equality did better in vocational education programmes than their counterpart who were averagely and lowly conscious.

Table 2: Fisher's LSD of the influence of gender equality consciousness on female learners' participation in vocational education

Variables	Level of consciousness	of low (n = 158)	Average (n = 86)	High (n = 86)
Gender equality	Low	12.16a	1.516b	5.437
	Average	13.325c	13.67	3.921
	High	13.730	8.414*	17.60

(MSW = 11.445)

Significant at 0.05 level

- a. Group means are along principal
- b. Difference among group means are above the principal diagonals
- c. t-values are below the principal diagonals.

Discussion of findings

The result of the hypothesis as presented in Table 1 revealed that gender equality consciousness significantly influence female learners' participation in vocational education programmes in Enugu State College of Education Technical. This significant influence could be as a result of the introduction of vocational and

entrepreneurship programmes in this study area. Therefore, the Department of Vocational Education should not fail to create awareness on the need of participation in vocational education. The findings is in line with the view of Omoruyi and Osunde (2004) who in their contribution to the advantages of vocational education asserted that, it is capable of ensuring gainful employment opportunities to other members of the society. It is pertinent to note that vocational education is a matchless and dynamic human resources development field of study.

The finding is in consonant with Alam (2008) in Ali and Muhammed (2013), who asserted that the knowledge of vocational skills is the prime mover of economic and social development of any nation; and that investment in human capital is an investment in the future of any country. Education and training could be regarded as bedrocks for improvement and have to do with person centered, community centered, and should be able to cater for social problems which include unemployment, crimes, poverty, drug abuse etc.

Conclusion

Gender equality consciousness significantly influences female learners' participation in vocational education programme. The study concluded that entrepreneurship departments have helped in providing useful information that have enriched the awareness level of the students irrespective of their gender. It has helped them gain useful information on skills acquisition and self – reliance to earn a living after school.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, it was recommended that all Colleges of Education should have functional vocational education department where information services, vocational services and awareness activities would be adequately programmed in order to help enhance and enrich students' knowledge about various skills in vocational education. The school should provide realistic avenue for exposing the learners to excursion or classroom experience to firms and industries where applicable, and also organizing vocational education week.

There should be partnership with civil society organization to promote female learners' participation in vocational education and there should be media campaigns like radio and television programmes and cultural forums to raise awareness about the important of female learners' participation in vocational education. Government should provide good learning environment and necessary educational facilities to female learners who are into vocational education programmes.

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