



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

Journal homepage: <http://www.journalijar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPLEMENTING VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING AMONG RURAL WOMEN FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITATIVE EDUCATION

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History:

Received: 12 February 2014
Final Accepted: 22 March 2014
Published Online: April 2014

Key words:

Vocational Skills, Formal
Education, Equal access,
Qualitative Education, Nigerian
Women.

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Abstract

Every citizen of a nation has the right to learn and be educated adequately in order to contribute adequately towards the continuous growth of the society. This is in line with the declaration in Jomtein, Thailand in 1990, and re-affirmed in Dakar Senegal in 2000, ensuring that educational opportunities be extended to all without exception by 2015, (FRN, 2004). But in spite of this, available data shows that a large segment of Nigerian population, about (18.7 million), comprising mostly women are yet to have unhindered access to education or adequate education. This paper reviews formal education which is hitherto exclusive, rather than inclusive, elitist and discriminatory, which alone cannot provide the all-round education needed for achieving harmonious societal development and transformation. The paper therefore calls for inclusion of vocational skill training alongside former education, to give women most especially in the rural areas access to qualitative education.

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Introduction

Education is a paramount tool for individual and national development. Igbuzor (2006) established that education is a key index of all development. The universal declaration on human rights to which Nigeria is a signatory, listed among other things, the right to education as one of the fundamental rights to all citizens, which has been re-affirmed in all major international human right conventions. Education has been regarded as the most significant instrument for changing women subjugated positions in the society. It does not only change the personality of individual woman, but qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political, and cultural functions and at the same time improves on their socio-economic status.

Although a number of efforts have been made to extend education to women, for instance, both Federal and state governments initiated actions and plans to improve women access to education through the establishment of National commission for Women Affairs, Ministry of women affairs, Women Education centers, establishment of various workshop and conferences at National and State levels. Recently, another palliative remedy for women's underwhelming representation in the National polity was the 35% of political positions promised by the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP) to women. In spite of these developments, this particular segment of the society has been neglected either through omission or commission and relegated to the background in the provision of qualitative education, Omiunu and Omoruyi (2008), Adeyemo (2006), Ifeyinwa (2005). This centered majorly on women and the girl child. Women over the years have been denied access to educational opportunities which has led to continual deprivations and limitations in their abilities to participate in social, economic and political development.

Women particularly in the rural communities suffer some kind of setback because of their inability to have access to developmental programmes meant for the generality of women. These programmes are majorly done in towns and cities, without considering those in the rural areas. To support this, Dhemba (1999) pointed out that poverty is commonly seen to be a rural phenomenon, whereas, rapid urbanization, coupled with economic factors have led to increase concentration of urban centers. Wagner (1995) also confirmed that rural residents have lower

literacy levels than urban residents. In addition, Aderinoye (1997) and Nwabuke (2004), both raised alarmed that organization and structure of adult education in Nigeria only exist in Federal, States and Local governments levels, and that there is nothing to show their reality at the implementation field or areas where vulnerable target groups may take advantage of them.

Women in the rural communities require education for many reasons, one of which sees education as a right, i.e. the right to free and compulsory education, without discrimination and of good quality, to be well informed, to satisfy specific individual needs, for cultural changes, to attain better health for the family, for poverty reduction and most importantly to contribute meaningfully to the running of the society. Unfortunately, women at the grassroots lack the necessary supports or resources to perform these roles due to their low level of education.

Barriers to Women Education

There have been many challenges militating against women education in Nigeria. One of these is illiteracy, many women suffered from ignorance resulting from illiteracy. The effect of this can be felt in all aspects of their lives. For instance, an illiterate woman can not appreciate the importance of education for herself and her children, neither will she appreciate the importance of good health, proper hygiene, and better ways of raising and caring for children. Added to this was the socio-cultural impediment, which includes patriarchal injustice of early marriage, giving priority to male child education at the expense of the female, regarding women as subordinate to men, both within and outside the home.

High cost of education and poverty is yet another constrain to women education in Nigeria. Poverty has been regarded as a function of illiteracy and low quality of education, majority of the women in the rural areas live below poverty line. Thus they could not afford the cost of education. This results in the women struggling for survival by shifting their time and energy to other income providing activities thereby relegating education to the background.

The system of education in Nigeria is yet another barrier that fault women education. Since independence, education in the country has been a colonial hangover geared towards academics with the emphasis being on the acquisition of literacy knowledge to enable learners pass examination, get certificated and take up white collar jobs. This to a great extent eroded the tradition of Nigeria Education which was basically vocational in nature and largely run on apprenticeship system in crafts, Arts and Agriculture. The system then was functional; it enables the women to obtain a skill in order to earn a living and a woman who is without craft or trade or who was totally dependent on her husband was looked at with contempt.

The formal system of education underscores the need to adopt an alternative measure that can help to expand educational opportunities to women. For instance, formal schooling does not consider the aspect of vocational skills. The objectives was thus far from being realized, as majority of the learners, mostly the girl child are dropping out for not being able to cope with the harsh programme and the technical aspect of the education that can easily be grabbed by male child. On this, Akpama and Andong, in Hambeh (1987) have criticized formal schooling for its inability to teach the skills, which relate to rural conditions of most people living in the rural areas of which, women form the majority, They were of the opinion that there is need to evolve training programmes outside the formal school, which are based on the needs in rural area where both adults and youth will acquire knowledge and realize their potentials for development. In the same vein, Coklough et al (2003,) acknowledge the frequency of the theme of formal education as relative lack of education for women and its negative impacts on the economic and social development of the gender. In the same vein, Osuji, (2006) declared that the former system of education is selective, elitist and discriminatory, while Adult education takes care of a wider clientele and is non-discriminatory in any society and that it takes cares of person's whole life.

Need for Women Access to Qualitative Education.

Women education is very important for the fact that they are the first teacher of the children, they are also considered as the pillar of their home. There is a saying that "If you educate a man, you educate a person, educate a woman, then you educate a nation. The notable work of a woman could be seen in the traditional roles being performed by women. They are noted for the crucial role of bearing and raising of children, For instance the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has a mother that nurtured him, ditto to all the state Governors as well as every man in the society. Without prejudice to our religious, tradition and cultural beliefs, women in the society have a lot to contribute to the development of the nation. It is therefore necessary for them to be well educated so that as the custodian of human beings, they could raise the level of humanity.

Women in the rural area, many of whom are illiterates need to improve themselves, they need to be empowered economically and socially by engaging in various vocational skills programmes so that they can support their immediate families, communities, and the nation at large in the task of building a virile country. Okpoko, (2002) stressed that non-formal education is a substantive strategy to bringing about changes in rural

women who will in turn contribute to the development of their communities. And at the same time enable them live better quality lives, and give them the opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues relating to the concerns and aspirations of women. Vocational skills centers should therefore be created in rural communities to discourage illiteracy.

Women also need qualitative education for them to be free from male domination, societal discrimination, financial incapability, and socio-economic buoyancy. Access to basic needs such as adequate food, shelter, clothing and essential services like safe drinking water, sanitation, and better housing conditions should be what they are familiar with in their environment

Vocational Skills Acquisition and its Potentials for Women Development

Non formal education has been seen as indispensable tools for changing people's attitudes and belief so that they can have the capacity to assess and address their problems. Vocational skill training is all encompassing, very central and expedient for the acquisition of skills, abilities, values, attitudes, and competencies essential for purposes of employment, on the job improvement as well as poverty reduction. This will in no doubt assist the women to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experiences they require to perform effectively their social, economic and political roles.

To enhance women's contributions to national development they need to have access to available educational programmes in formal education system as well as vocational skill training. This will impact the necessary skills and training that will reduce their fatigue and also enhance their further participation in non formed education programmes. Some of the crafts and skills that can be imparted on women in the rural communities include: clothe weaving, tie and dye, farming, hair dressing, dress making, soap making, fashion design etc.

Strategies for Re-Implementing Vocational Skills Training

Implementation of vocational skill training in the school curriculum: The reason why the girl child dropped out of formal schooling is because of the technical aspect of the education and because of the rigidity of the curriculum, Nigeria like any other developing countries should try as much as possible to harness vocational skill training: such as clothe weaving, tie and dye, farming, hair dressing, soap making, fashion design etc. in her curriculum right from basic classes for socio-economic development.

In addition Nigerian women most especially in the rural communities need to be motivated and mobilized to understand the aims of formal and non-formal education, and the opportunities available for their individual growth and the welfare of the society. Thus vocational skills training programme should be taken to where the target group, (rural communities) either in their communities, homes, businesses, as well as in various religious organizations. This will helped to change their attitudes and beliefs and at the same time help them to acquire some capacity for self-analysis, interpersonal skills and a sense of social purpose

Furthermore, provision of an unhindered access to education for all requires huge sum of money. The government alone cannot meet this need adequately. The of funding non-formal education should be done in partnership with Federal Government, State Government, Local government as well as all other organizations. This should be properly funded and streamlined to alleviate poverty. Also experts in various skills should be invited inviting experts to teach the learners, because many of the facilitators are not trained instructors. And by providing social and security facilities which take greater interest in the education of women. Workshops and training programmes should be provided for them to provide necessary instructional techniques.

Conclusion

It is belief that poverty is generally associated with high illiteracy rate, most especially among the rural women. This paper has viewed women empowerment through vocational training programmes as a great weapon to curtailing illiteracy, over economic dependency on men which rubs women of decision making in the family. However a better chance for women and girls to climb a social ladder of development faster as identified by this paper is by engaging in vocational training programmes. This will not only change the personality of individual woman, but qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political, and cultural functions and at the same time improves on their socio-economic status.

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