

GENDER DISPARITY IN THE ACQUISITION OF TECHNICAL-VOCATIONAL SKILLS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

The research work was carried out to ascertain the causes of gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme. Two research questions were raised to guide the study, while a survey design method was used for the study. A total population of 185 respondents was used for the study. A 20-item questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents.

The findings showed that the unconscious influence of the society and parental/guardian opinion cause gender disparity in the acquisition of technical-vocational skills. Conclusion was drawn and some recommendations were made to include: Efforts should be made to carry out campaign to sensitize parents and members of the public about issues of gender disparity in technical-vocational skilled programme. Incentives in the form of bursaries and scholarship should be provided to encourage females who may want to engage in technical-vocational skilled programmes, among others.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The National Policy on Education (NPE) (2004) refers to technical-vocational skills as the study of technologies and related sciences for the acquisition of practical skills, attitude, understanding and knowledge that lead to occupational field for effective participation in the world of work and also a method of alleviating poverty. Egwu (2009) asserts that Nigeria, like any other developing nations is undergoing fundamental, social, economic and political reforms. The forces for these reforms are derived from the commitment to the implementation of international draft agreement such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education For All (EFA), and back home in Nigeria, the 7-point agenda of this present administration. All these challenges have enormous implication on our educational system.

UNESCO (1978) defines technical and vocational education as the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skill and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. It further states that the broad goals of technical and vocational is directed at developing the particular skills and related knowledge required by specific occupations or group of occupations

However, in this era of reform, the issue of gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition needs to be addressed and given utmost priority. This is to ensure gender equality in this area of our educational sub-sector so that every Nigerian citizen irrespective of sex can compete favourably in any parts of the world. Based on the quest for technical-vocational skills development, the federal government has put in place a number of measures and counter measures to fast-track the acquisition of technical-vocational skills. Among these include:

1. National Board for Technical Education (NBTE). This body has the mission of promoting the production of skilled technical-vocational manpower to revitalize and sustain the nation's economy and to ensure the reduction of unemployment and poverty.
2. National Directorate of Employment (NDE). It is an arm of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, with the aim of vocational skills development that embraces technical skills. However with all policies put in place to promote technical-vocational skills acquisition, there is no gender restriction attached to them.

Thom-Otuya (2008) defined skills simply as business skills, which an individual acquires for him to function effectively in the turbulent business environment as an entrepreneur or a self-employed or a self-reliant. Enudi, Okagbare, and Akpere, (2008) define skills as individual's ability or abilities to perform specific task of assignment successfully. To attain these skills they said the individual or persons need to acquire basic training or knowledge levels related to the assignment or task to be performed whether through formal training or a combination of both.

Ikenga, Ezoem and Atiti (2009) opine that many societies are beginning to realize that gender equality constitutes a major factor that can propel a nation towards economic growth. The implication of this is that the neglect of a particular sex in the developmental process of any nation or society can constitute a human waste syndrome. It will therefore be a disservice of any society to ignore the development effort, contributions and numerical strength of both sexes in all facets of human endeavors.

In every society there seems to be a social difference between a male and female in terms of roles and responsibilities, though these roles vary from one society to another and from one culture to another. Sigh (2005) asserts that for ages we have been socialized into believing that the different roles and status accorded to men and women in the society is determined by biological attribute which is natural, constant and therefore not changeable. The role changes with time, culture and with religion. Therefore neither sex nor nature is responsible for the unjustifiable inequalities that exist between men and women in terms of roles and status in society. It concluded that inequality between men and women is therefore created by historical construct and therefore can be questioned, challenged and changed.

Enueme (2004) states that gender disparity mean lopsidedness in access to various developmental opportunities as it affects both males and females. The dichotomous nature existing between males and females role in occupations has led to inequality that has manifested in numerous dimensions in our daily lives. These differences are very much evidenced in our private and public lives, choices of occupation, career ambitions and aspirations which have great effect on societal development. It would appear that gender disparity seems to be very obvious in schools that offer courses in technical-vocational programme as a result of the unconscious influences of the society, family/parental opinion, cultural and social norms. There is the societal feeling that technical skills are only suitable for the males, and the females are discriminated against and discouraged from such type of career, since it is generally believed that technical skills development process are difficult. There is also the negative societal perception that technical-vocational acquisition are incompatible with mother's role at home, and that girls who take to such careers have slim chances of getting married. These negative thoughts may influence the interest, self confidence among the female folk and reduce their ability and motivation to opt for careers in technical skills acquisition programmes.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Looking critically at the various technical-vocational skilled programmes in Nigeria that are designed to train youth, it would appear that there is a clear case of gender disparity in skills areas, such as automobile engineering, welding and fabrication, electrical installation and maintenance, mechanical engineering, craft practice, building and construction, hairdressing, plumbing and pipe-fitting, carpentry and joinery, building and concreting, catering. Supporting this claim Bedekale (2008) asserts that a cursory look at the different technical-vocational skill areas in Nigeria reveal that it is dominated by men and as such, it is regarded as a male domain and any female that go into these areas are seen to have step out of line. She concludes by saying that women are under-represented in almost all core technical areas and over represented in vocational skill areas such as nursing, business studies and home economics.

According to UNESCO (2004), one of the most urgent challenges facing the world today is the growing number of people that are excluded from meaningful participation in the economic, social,

political and cultural life of their communities and their nations in general. Such a society is neither efficient nor safe. Educational discrimination in favour of males in male dominated occupations and favour of females in female dominated occupations can prevent the society from achieving the quest for rapid social and economic development. The study seeks to find out the reasons for gender disparity and ways to narrow this disparity.

The table below shows the distribution of sex of apprentices in individual trades in 2005.

Title: Distribution of Apprentices and Trades according to Sex

Types of Trades	Males	Females
Metal Work	110	-
Hairdressing	48	144
Copying/duplicating	120	76
Art work	24	-
Watch repair	13	-
Wood work	117	-
Auto Mechanics	795	-
Photography	17	5
Fashion Designing	201	102
Welding	94	-
Shoe Making	80	-
Laundering	28	-
Electrical/Electronic Work	432	-
Tinkering	82	-
TOTAL	2215	327

Source: Ekpenyong (2005).

The table above clearly shows that there is gender disparity in trades' practices. In view of this imbalance associated with gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition, this study was focused to investigate the factors that are responsible for gender disparity in technical-vocational skill acquisition programmes in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State of Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that are responsible for the cause of gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State. Specifically, the study intended to:

1. Find out how the unconscious influence of the society causes gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programmes.
2. Find out if parents/guardians influence their children against career choices in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. Does the unconscious influence of the society cause gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme?
2. To what extent do parents/guardians influence their children against careers choices in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be of immense benefit to educational agencies such as the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) that are responsible for the monitoring, regulating, and accrediting courses in technical-vocational colleges, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Technical) and other agencies responsible for various technical-vocational skill acquisition programmes. Secondly, the findings will also be of immense benefit to the

Ministry of Education, Youth and Development. This can be done by carrying out an awareness campaign to sensitize the public on the need for equal opportunities for both males and females in technical-vocational acquisition programmes.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was designed to cover males and females final year students in four selected schools in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State. However, final year males and females students from West End Mixed Secondary school, Asagba Mixed secondary school, Anglican Girls Grammar school and St. Patrick College all in Asaba were used to determine the outcome of this study.

METHODOLOGY

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study employed the survey research design to elicit information from the respondents. Olaitan and Okoye (1999) defined a survey research as a descriptive study in which the entire population or representative sample is studied by collecting and analyzing data from the group through the use of a questionnaire. The survey research design was therefore considered suitable since the study sought information from a sample that was drawn from the population.

POPULATION

The population of this study consisted of Senior Secondary School three (SSS 3) students with a total population of 1000 students from the four schools in Oshimili South Local Government Area.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 200 students comprising 100 males and 100 females' senior secondary school three (SSS 3) students for the study representing 20% of the population.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

A 4-point rating scale of 20-item questionnaire that covered the research questions was developed for the data collection by the researchers after a thorough review of relevant literature.

VALIDITY OF INSTRUMENT

The instrument was subjected to both face and content validity through the comments, observation and suggestions by four Lecturers, two from the department of Vocational Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria and the other two from the department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Benin, Nigeria.

RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

To establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted on a sample of twelve (12) students that were not used in the main study. After two weeks interval, the same instrument was re-administered on the same group of students. The Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, a reliability coefficient of (r) of 0.68 was established.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The instrument was administered to the respondents through personal contacts by the researchers. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents in the four schools used for the study. A total of 185 of the questionnaires were found useable representing 92.5%.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. From the calculation of the mean of the responses of the research questions, item with a mean cut-off point equal or less than 2.49 was rejected.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Research Question 1:

How does the unconscious influence of the society cause gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of respondents' responses on the unconscious influence of the society that causes disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programmes

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	REMARK
1	Careers in technical-vocational skills is only suitable for males	4.16	1.41	Accept
2	The perceived difficulty in technical-vocational skills causes gender disparity	3.58	1.48	Accept
3	The discrimination against female sex causes gender disparity	3.94	1.34	Accept
4	Our culture does not allow women to have technical skills	2.39	1.31	Reject
5	The dirty nature of technical-vocational occupation causes gender disparity	3.91	1.31	Accept
6	The use of large and sophisticated machines in technical-vocational occupations causes gender disparity	3.44	1.40	Accept
7	Few female sex in technical-vocational skills occupation causes gender disparity	3.04	1.50	Accept
8	Lack of role model to emulate causes gender disparity	3.46	1.45	Accept
9	Male sex domination in technical-vocation occupation causes gender disparity	3.27	1.49	Accept
10	Lack of persons of sex to share future career prospect will make me to dislike technical-vocational skills	3.16	1.44	Accept

Table 1 revealed that only item 4 (x 2.39) was not caused by societal influence as a factor that is responsible for gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition items, while items 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10 are all caused by societal influence.

Research Question 2

Two what extent do parents/guardian influences their children against careers in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the extent at which parents/guardian influence their children against careers in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme.

S/N		X	SD	REMARK
1	My parents advice me that careers in technical-vocational skills have adverse effect on marriage opportunity	3.55	1.58	Accept
2	My father said technical-vocational skilled workers close late from work	3.27	1.30	Accept
3	Technical-vocational skills occupations are incompatible with mother's care at home	3.31	1.39	Accept
4	Those that take to technical-vocational skills occupations do not marry on time	3.48	1.46	Accept
5	My uncle said that technical-vocational skills practitioner look masculine in nature	3.62	1.41	Accept
6	My mother said technical-vocational skills require much strength for its implementation	3.21	1.48	Accept
7	Technical-vocational skills are foreign skills	3.39	1.48	Accept
8	My aunty said that female that take to technical skills do not do well	3.32	1.56	Accept
9	My parents advise that technical-vocational skills manipulation is not compatible with women during pregnancy	3.45	1.48	Accept
10	My parents advise that technical skilled personnel look tough and aggressive, that I should not enroll into it	3.31	1.51	Accept

The result in table 2 shows that all items are factors that contribute to gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings on the unconscious influence of the society as presented in table 1 showed that 9 out of 10 items are factors that are responsible for the causes of gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme. The findings in item 7 and 9 agree with the assertion of Bedekale (2008) that gender disparity in technical skills is much, that a cursory look at different technical skills areas in Nigeria will reveal that it is dominated by male and the females into it are seen to have step out of line.

The findings associated with parents/guardian influences against technical-vocational skills acquisition in table 2 revealed that the respondents agreed that career in technical-vocational skills have negative effect on female marriage opportunity and it is incompatible with mother's role or care at home. Items 5,6, and 9 agree with the view of Bedekale (2008) that the disparity emanated from traditional image of working with technical profession as being related with heavy object, dirty and masculine in nature, that it requires much strength, that any woman who wishes to succeed in this field has to be tough, aggressive and masculine. All the items in table 2 are accepted as factors that inhibit gender disparity in technical-vocational skills acquisition programme.

CONCLUSION

In any society where people both male and female are excluded from meaningful participation towards developmental effort, such society is bound to move at snail pace towards the achievement of developmental stride. The technological development of any nation is comparatively rapid if the male and female sex avail themselves the opportunity to acquire technical-vocational skills without any form of stereotype that interfere with the interest of each individual. Therefore everyone should be encouraged to explore his or her career ambition based on interest and ability so as to contribute immensely towards national development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Efforts should be made to carryout sensitization campaign in print and electronic media to parents and members of the public on issues of gender disparity in technical-vocational skilled programmes and its attendant effects on the society in general and in the nation in particular.
- Vocational guidance in schools should be strengthened to guide and encourage female students' participation in technical skills acquisition programmes.
- Efforts should be made by the government, parents, teachers, and all stake holders in education industry to encourage the female enrolment into technical skilled programmes to serve as role models to younger females to emulate.
- The government should provide scholarship, bursaries to female students who enrol in technical skilled areas to make it attractive.
- The government should make efforts to collect data to enhance planning in gender -related issues in technical-vocational skilled programmes.

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