RE-ENGINEERING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A META ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education no doubt has always been seen as the most potent instrument for the upliftment of the individual, the society and the nation (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 2004). No nation can achieve greatness without a total tapping of human potentials in the vital areas that can speed up development. In Nigeria, only about half of the population precisely (men only) are adequately represented in vital areas that can enhance speedy and successful development. These areas includes among others; science and technology, politics and government. In these aforementioned areas, the women which constitute the other half of the population are underrepresented. Therefore, this paper addresses the issue of re-engineering women education in Nigeria for productivity and empowerment with regard to the factors affecting women education in Nigeria. Specifically, women education should be geared towards science and technology.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), had focused attention on the issue of women as an integral part of a nation’s population. In addition, conferences on women were held in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1980, at Nairobi (Kenya) in 1985 and in Beijing (China) in 1995 where issues about the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and their empowerment was discussed.

Women are under represented among others in science and technology, Politics and government, relative to their population. In Nigeria, the census organized in 1991 revealed that women form 50% of the population but they are under represented in politics and government (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 1987, population Reference Bureau 1998, and Makinde & Oladipo 1999).

Recently, in Nigeria one of the topmost priority in terms of development is the issue of mainstreaming gender into organizations. Hence achieving gender equality in
higher education is part of this priority and the focus of the Nigerian Educational Policy (NPE) 2005. In the third world sub-regions of which Nigeria is part, it is clearly evident in the fields of science and technology that women are under represented (Rathgeber 1995, UNESCO 1993, Torren 1991, and EFA 2002).

From the foregoing, the under representation of women in these vital areas, such as science and technology, politics and government, will make it an issue of concern because of the practical implications it has on the technological development and growth of the country’s economy. These developing countries, Nigeria inclusive rely mostly on the advanced countries for their sustenance in areas of technology.

These challenges that face the developmental needs of the country call for modernization of her economy to automate her productions and to improve the standard of living of its citizens. One of the means of actualizing these dreams would be through breakthrough in science and technology. The under representation of women would no doubt adversely affect productivity and empowerment in the life of the individual, society and nation. In this regard, there is the need to find out ways of representing the women fully in the nation’s developmental process and goals so as to make for peace and progress in the nation. This problem of under representation of women can be solved through re-engineering of women education to suit the present day needs of the country in terms of productivity, empowerment, and nation building.

Education is the only way out of this problem of under representation of women in vital areas especially science and technology. Education can be defined as a process of bringing about desirable changes in the individual’s behaviour and thought to enable him/her improve upon his/her well being and that of the society. Education involves all round development of the learners (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) 2004). Furthermore education is from a Latin word meaning to lead out, bring up, to elevate (Idowu 2002, Fagbemi 2002 & Amaele 2003). From the above definition, the women have undergone some educational process because some changes have taken place even though it is not in the expected areas, hence the need to re-engineer their education to suit the present day needs in the areas of science and technology.

Re-engineering women education simply means to redesign it or reconstruct it from what it is now to a better state according to the needs of the nation. By implication, the factors affecting women education will be examined in this paper. In re-engineering women education, the focus should be on science and technology. This will afford the women an opportunity to close the gaps that are existing in terms of 100% representation in the human resources available in Nigeria. This implies that the men and the women will be adequately represented thereby eradicating the problems that have been created as a result of the under representation of the women.

The factors that affect women education includes among others, social-cultural constraints, individual factor, cognitive factor, attitudinal factor, educational factor, home and family factors (Oleleye 2007). In order to carry out a successful investigation into the factors affecting women education in Nigeria, there is the need to carry out a
comprehensive review of related literature on the factors affecting women education in Nigeria.

Investigating the factors affecting women education in Nigeria will help to highlight areas of differences, relationships, problems, conflicts, conclusions and clarifications that will enhance the success of the programme of re-engineering women education towards science and technology.

Factors Affecting the Education of Women

The factors affecting the education of women in Nigeria could be grouped under five broad categories which includes among others, gender factors, individual factors, cognitive factors, attitudinal factors, home and family factors, educational factors, socio-cultural factors, and financial factors. A review of literature of the factors affecting women education in Nigeria will be looked at in order to make for a better understanding of the topic under investigation.

(1) Gender Factor

The main issue in the review of related literature as regards the factors that affect women education is the behaviour pattern of females towards science and technology, which is influenced by their gender and experiences during the course of their socialization. This makes the women view science and technology as a field for men (Lei & Leary 1990). Women are not given enough encouragement as men to pursue a career in science. Women/females on their own part also do not encourage themselves to read science subjects or take a career in science. Gender issues pose a big problem to the women when we talk of pursuing a career in science. Intervention programmes have been mounted in several parts of the world to reduce gender imbalance in science and technology. However, most of the programmes are gradually closing the gap in mathematics achievement (Kahle & Meere 1994)

Owolabi (2002) reported that women enrollment in science related fields is still low and that men dominate the science and technology disciplines most especially, engineering and veterinary medicine, according to him, women are mostly in Nursing, Humanities, Education and Food and nutrition.

From personal observations and interviews women/females see science subjects as exclusively meant for men to read. Even when they find a female reading science and technology courses, they see them as men in disguise, and some even condemn them for reading the sciences. According to Bauman & Anderson (1980), Amaele 1991, Population Reference Bureau (1998) girls rarely have more schooling than boys. Sex disparity is more pronounced at the higher level of the educational system. Enrollment figures for females at all levels of education especially at the tertiary level, College of education, Science and technology and University is low.

In a research study by Olaleye (2007), carried out on the women in science and technology using three universities in Western Nigeria, the result revealed that in the Federal University of Technology Akure, Ondo State, it showed a huge gender disparity
in enrollment of students in science and technology, for example in 2000/2001 session, 8,556 (84.8%) were males while 1,304 (15%) were females, resulting in a female to male ratio of 0.18 to 1. However, there was a marked improvement in females’ enrollment in 2003/2004 session which rose to 30% but later dropped to 21.8% in 2004/2005 session. From this report, there is a serious call for greater attention to women participation in science and technology in Nigeria. Moreover, the education of women should not be gender biased.

(2) Individual Factor

Individual factors also affect women education. Women/females don’t want to read demanding courses like sciences and some don’t want to stress themselves up. Individual factors could be their state of mind or their attitude towards a particular field (AAU 1993, Catsambia 1995, Kelly 1985, Rennie and Punch 1991, Shepherd 1993).

(3) Educational Factor

Education is a strong force when talking about empowerment and productivity in the life of women. For women to be able to take proper participation in vital aspects of life such as science and technology, politics and government, they must be deeply rooted in education. Majority of women are derailed politically not because they do not have political potentials, but because of education (Anuma 1996). Formal education is an active means of empowering women. In almost all aspects of life, education plays the role of socialization of people (Coleman 1995, Anuma 1996, Alele Williams 1992). It is widely believed that education is an important tool in the achievement of social justice and equity (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1987, Saura 1996). The research report of these researchers also is in line with the findings of Baker (1990), Jegede & Okebukola (1992). It is believed that education will enable the women to effectively fulfill their gender role and participate in the development of the country.

(4) Socio-Cultural Factor

The cultural and social bases represent the component of the society, its expectations, the prevailing cultural systems, its values obtained from the past and its future expectations (Olawepo and Jekayinfa 1999). There are dynamic elements that are very active in determining the education of women in so many ways among others, their choice of career, their curriculum of study, the goals and purposes. Culture is not only limited to intellectual production only, it covers all aspects of human behavior, hence it is able to affect the education of women since it is the way of life of a particular society, their social systems, their institutions as well as prevailing values and their principles. In this regard, women education is affected since most of them choose careers that are acceptable in their society for women (Olawepo and Jekayinfa 1999).

(5) Home and Family Factors:

These are the first socialisers of any individual. The type of home/family a person comes from has great effect on his education, for instance a student from a wealthy home will not have problem with financing her education. Most women read
courses that their parents, guardians, husbands or themselves can finance. Some women may have the intellectual ability to read sciences such as medicine, engineering, pharmacy but may be handicapped by finance.

According to Anuma (1996) who opined that perhaps the payment of fees is most troubling for poor parents who incidentally are in the majority so when choice has to be made, the female child is sacrificed.

Conclusion

Women education in Nigeria is faced with many challenges which have been discussed above and recommendations have been proffered for better women education. This will help to solve the problem of under representation, low productivity and empowerment in Nigeria. Women education is affected by some factors among others, gender, education, individual, cognitive, cultural and attitudinal factors. Women are under-represented in science and technology, hence, the result is low enrollment rates in the universities. It is therefore expected that when women education is directed towards science and technology, the problem of under representation, low productivity and empowerment of the women folk will become a thing of the past.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, here are some recommendations; there is the need to get more women to study science and technology based subjects. The under representation of women poses a big challenge for nation building in terms of productivity and empowerment. It is compulsory for government to give scholarship awards or bursary to female students in science and technology to encourage them.

In addition, the females should be exposed to science and technology early at the primary and secondary school levels. This is aimed at removing the obstacles that keep females from being interested in science and technology based courses. Consequently, it calls for the government to provide adequate science equipments and good or functional laboratories for science in schools at the primary/secondary levels.

Guidance and counseling services should be made functional in schools to enable them counsel students on the importance of science and technology and above all encourage them to read sciences. Parents should also encourage their female children to read sciences. Serious actions aimed at improving the teaching and learning of science and technology must be taken in terms of methodology, selection and training of teachers of sciences. The enrollment trend of females in sciences and technology at all levels of education should improve upon by at least 50% in each case. Policies by the government such as payment of fees for female science students should be looked into. Science at the lower levels should be taken more seriously by school administrators and capacity building for science teachers is needed in this modern age. Scholarship awards should be given to female students offering science subjects in the secondary schools as an encouragement for more females to read science and technology based disciplines. For instance, the association of women in science and technology is doing so. It is aimed at promoting the education of women. It is of
paramount importance for universities in Nigeria to take in cognizance, gender imbalance in science and technology.

Gender studies can be incorporated into the university curriculum where issues concerning male and female can be discussed very well. It is incumbent upon Nigerian universities both public and private to introduce programmes for promoting women participation in science and technology. Furthermore, female scientists should organize seminars, workshops/programmes that will help to inform women of the importance of science and technology.

It is hopeful that if these recommendations are taken seriously, women education should be directed towards science and technology thereby increasing the participation of women in science and technology.

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