

**VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN IMO STATE**

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ABSTRACT

Women have faced various challenges that have barred them from unleashing their economic potency in the respected circles they belong particularly in developing nations. World over this has been a major concern because the consequences of poverty and under-utilization cannot be over emphasized. This paper has examined the importance of vocational; and technical education towards empowering women to be economically relevant in Imo State. It discussed the concept of vocational and technical education and its implications on the economic empowerment of women. It identifies basic barriers women have in assessing technical education. It recommends among other issues that mass enlightenment not only for women on the female economic role will gain them support to access vocational and technical education.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational and Technical education provides technological literacy to sustain life daily. It aims at making individuals that are armed with skills knowledge to secure employment either by gaining it or establishing a personal output. This is actualized when these organized competencies are active in meeting daily needs of socio – economic life. (Uko-Aviamoh and Ajuluchi 2008). Although education is an important equal right for all people,

if the current educational gap between the rates of men and women are considered, it is quite huge. Education is hypocritical when gender roles are taken into view. The perception of women gender roles in productivity, fertility, religion negatively affects their participation in education and economic matters. Clearly even if those roles exist a practical education with a broad spectrum of career choices will create options that can afford women the opportunity to contribute immensely to the economy of their homes and the state in this challenging times.

Whenever a group of people or an individual is handicapped to actualize desires, maximize natural potentials as a result of artificial barriers within the environment a room is created for empowerment. Okeke (1995) analyses empowerment as giving power to, giving authority to enable a person gain power. In this context women need vocational education to assess economic empowerment.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Anerua and Obiazi 2002, define Vocational and Technical education as a process which enhances self-employment and skill acquisition. It is a process of creating something new which is different from an already existing one. This involves occupational training administered in schools under supervision to make the individual employable.

The National Policy on Technical Education (NPE, 2004) states that Technical and Vocational Education is used as a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

Ekpeyong 2005 selected the following as functional areas of technical education.

MECHANIC TRADES

Agricultural implements and equipment, mechanics work, Auto engineering practices, Auto body repairs and spray/painting, Auto mobile Engineering practice, body mechanic work etc..

COMPUTER CRAFT PRACTICE: Data processing, Electrical Engineering trade, Electrical installation and maintenance work, Radio Television and electrical work and appliance repairs.

WOOD TRADES: Machine, Carpentry and joinery furniture making and upholstering.

BUILDING TRADES: Block laying, Brick laying and Concrete work, painting and decorating, plumbing and pipe – fitting.

TEXTILE TRADES: Garment making (ladies/men dresses) textile and dyeing and bleaching.

BUSINESS TRADES : Stenography, Typewriting, Storekeeping, Book keeping, and office practice.

In furtherance of the above, the National Policy on Education emphasizes that vocational education is to give training and impart the necessary skills to the individuals who shall be self-reliant economically (FRN, 2004). The service delivery of this kind of education is not limited to formal schools for certification. It is not just the bookish thing. It has basic life implications as the policy announced various aspects of it including thus:

- i. An integral part of general education
- ii. A means of preparing for occupational fields and effective participation in the world of work
- iii. An aspect of lifelong learning and preparation for responsible citizenship
- iv. A method of facilitating poverty alleviation,

These articles are in uniformity with UNESCO reports (2002).

Again, selection of subjects from trade and Entrepreneurship will help students impose basic or secondary education build up in career development. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is covered by the following institutions:

- I. Technical colleges
- II. Vocational Enterprises institutions (VEIS)
- III. National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF)
- IV. Tertiary Technology Education offered in Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, and Colleges of Education (Technical)..

The National Policy on Education 2013 has recommended availability of innovation Enterprise Institutions with goals including education of post – secondary students to think creatively and transform knowledge through technical processes into wealth, and have a broader economic base which shall be non formal and private sector driven but not precluding public/private partnership.

Women will benefit a lot from these institutions as they can choose their study periods.

IMPORTANCE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Women can be categorized into the following groups;

- The girl child who needs to be prepared career wise
- Women who have been sidelined to be house wives and basically consumers.
- Women who have been denied access to any kind of training due to cultural or religious practices
- Working class women in white collar jobs who have the propensity to be vocationally creative
- Women in rural areas who are ignorant of how to utilize their environment
- Women who have been tied to high child productivity

For these categories of women and more, vocational and technical education finds a place to make them economy driven.

Akpomie (2009) maintains that in order to move forward technologically, industrially, and economically, a nation must develop a potent partner initiative in the creation of wealth,

poverty reduction and employment generation with required skills. Such skills integrate technical human and specific skills to cope with the challenges of the future since vocational and technical education is a crucial tool for the sustainable advancement of any nation.

The emphasis to prioritize the vocational skills development of women was again brought forward at the fourth world conference on women. The following objectives were outlined: promoting, supporting and strengthening female vocational and technical development encouraging investment in environmentally safe products; productive agricultural fisheries, commercial and industrial activities, strengthening training opportunities.

Ahianté and Ademila (2011) maintain vocational education will empower women to be entrepreneurial leaders in small scale areas like; metal work, wood work, business center operations. There are also vocations which can be centered around the home like; bracelet and bead making, soya bean milk, various cream making, poultry, fish farming, snailery, bakery. These skills are cultivated from primary school curriculum through the tertiary. As earlier stated, women out of school have access to accredited bodies and non-governmental organizations who can train them.

In addition, small and medium enterprises (SMES) are recognized world over as facilitators of economic growth and transformation. Employing large portion of 80% in the Nigerian labour force SMES have heightened the national economic growth.

Women are primary care givers to children and members of their household. They need knowledge of domestic skills in ; cookery, farming, needle work, craft, to serve their immediate community. It will reduce money spending if these activities are not commercialized.

CHALLENGES WOMEN FACE ASSESSING TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Over time, the under utilization of women economically, have been a thing of worry; 61% of the total female population are reported to be illiterates as against 37.7% illiterate male population. The dichotomy against women in both social and economic spheres limits their access to education. Some religions limits many women from benefitting from school instructors, social interactions and participations in economic activities. Access to funds has been a far cry of entrepreneurs in the state. The bank lending rate and collateral required are not easy challenges to maneuver, this has further discouraged women from training in vocations since they cannot put into use the skills acquired.

Poor societal view has constrained the mind of women to have the following misconceptions;

- ✓ That men only acquire wealth by their status and strength
- ✓ That the height of womanhood attained in child productivity, education emancipates one through a clear knowledge and approach

With the knowledge of technical and appliances, the gap is bridged.

Illiteracy is the bed rock of ignorance. As the economic empowerment process is associated with education, (Oguntuyi, 2003) asserts that since vocational and technical degrees are regarded as inferior to regular academic degrees, the acute shortage of vocational technical teachers will be a constant. Even when choices of courses and schools are made, people shy away from vocational courses. (This social perspective can be attributed to the ignorance.

Uloko and Ejinkeonye(2010) identify inadequate mass mobilization by way of publicity campaigns as a contributory factor in stunting the growth of vocational training/education, which in turn affects job creation. Offering vocational education in a formal environment, Ekpeyong (2010) identifies inadequate facilities, laboratories, equipment, running water, energy supply, machines amongst others.

CONCLUSION

Vocational and technical skills are needed for capacity building not only for men but women too. This will help create jobs, reduce the financial stress in homes and add to the economic growth as a global issue has arisen to address the fact that there will be a survival if structures and institutions can be transformed to enable every woman be a creator and not just a consumer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All women should have access to vocational and technical education at any level desired.
- Enlightenment on the economic values of women should be en masse and not limited to the women folk by all stake holders.
- Creation of non-governmental organizations should be encouraged particularly in the rural areas to widen the acquisition scope.
- Loan and credit scheme should be soft enough to meet the soaring list of those who need them.
- Basic infrastructures like; energy supply, water, road building should remain a priority to the government.
- The tax system should recognize income level and encourage infant industries.

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