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**SKILL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF WOMEN FOR SELF-SUSTENANCE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

E. B. Usoro & G. A. Akpan
Department of Vocational Education
University of Uyo, Uyo

Abstract

Education and skill acquisition should be pursued not merely as a sectoral target, but as an integral part of human development plan. Such human development produces substantial value for money. This is reflected both in national accounts and in individual earnings. Evidence abounds that educational deprivation shuts women out of the mainstream of social, economic and political structure, limits their participation in modern labour force and locks them into relative low productivity work. There is, therefore, the need to put in place an educational framework and skill acquisition programmes necessary to trigger and surge ahead the self-sustenance of women. This paper identifies some vocational skill areas in which women could be trained and also highlights strategies that should be adopted in vocational education to ensure the development of the needed skills for self-sustenance.

1.0 Introduction

The training and development of human resources has moved to the centre of the global development debate. It has become a common phenomenon for countries all over the world to incorporate the development of human resources in every sphere of their developmental programmes (Odekunle, 2000:5). Education builds the human capital, which is a key component in economic growth, technological capability and social transformation. People are perceived as the ultimate resource whose sustenance constitutes the all-encompassing goal of development with education as its wellspring. Unfortunately, women who constitute about half of the Nigerian population have remained educationally disadvantaged (Nkechi, 1994).

Literature is replete with the positive pay-offs and the multiplier effects of female education on the individual, the family and the nation. Evidence also abounds to the effect that educational deprivation shuts women out of the mainstream of social, economic and political structures; limits their participation in modern labour force and locks them into relatively low productivity work. Lack of education, whether, formal or informal, leaves women helplessly trapped in and increases their dependency ratio.

Obviously, a nation with larger gender gaps tends to have lower economic productivity than another with similar capital and labour resources but with smaller gender gaps in schooling (King and Hill, 1991). In agreement with the aforesaid, world declaration, Article 3.3 maintains that, "The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated".

More recently, to incorporate women into the mainstream of development, the Nigerian government has declared women's education "as a policy impact area", giving it a distinct status within the overall education programme with special funding and effective implementation (Blueprint on women education, 1986). This necessitated the setting up of women education branch in the Federal Ministry of Education in September 1986.

Therefore, it is pertinent to educate/develop women in various business approaches. This is significantly obtainable in the informal sector. According to Frank (2000), informal sector activities are a heterogeneous mix, encompassing a wide variety of economic activities that tends to be ignored in normal economic statistical analysis. Conceptually, it is believed that informal sector activities encompass an extraordinary variety of skills and knowledge often outside the boundaries of formal education. However, skill acquisition can be accomplished through work experience or through education in the school workshops and laboratories. The key is to build a better means of integrating academic education, skill training, and work experience with precision on women.

2.0 Constraints to Women Education/Development

In promoting education, government assured rather erroneously that the society places equal value on sons and daughters and would make rational decisions in respect of who among the children benefits from education in situation of limited resources. Culturally, the values for sons are higher than for daughters (Orobuloje, 1987), and therefore, when resources are limited, education of boys is given priority. For many families, the deferred possible benefits (e.g. of paid employment for school leavers) do not seem large enough to offset immediate cost like school fees. Parents do not often consider the less obvious benefit that education generates (like self sustainability). In some societies, parents tend to favour sons, partly because they are the ones expected to go out and earn more family income so this may be the cost efficient response by parents to the constraint of family resources.

Distortions in the labour market due to discriminatory employment practices against women reduce their earning and the benefits that women can expect to gain from education even when jobs are available. Examples are restrictions against the hiring of married women in wage-paying jobs in the manufacturing or service sectors. Explicit or implicit entry barriers against women in certain occupations serve as obstacles to education. Some of these barriers begin at the primary school level, with teachers and textbooks projecting attitudes that discourage school attendance and performance of girls. Stereotypes persist of many women not being as good as boys in technical subjects or mathematics.

Furthermore, in some societies, customs dictate that sons take responsibility for their parents, whilst girls marry out of their families at an early age and into their husband's families. In an area where the 'suitableness' of educated women to be good wives is held in doubt, the constraints are even more glaring. Anthropological and sociological studies have shown that in traditional Muslim societies, education beyond puberty is inhibited by the social pressure for women to become wives and mothers as soon as puberty is reached. Highly educated women's possibilities for marriage become limited. This tends to inhibit a woman's resources development for self-sustenance.

In addition, the cultural and religious factors which constrain female access to education, has since the 1980s been compounded by economic factors. While the causes have been linked to the family decision process, some studies have shown that decisions, particularly with respect to household resource allocation "is influenced by market signals and institutional norms". These market signal, often fail to recognize social returns on investing in women (World Bank 1995). Until such market failures are compensated for by equalizing the access to education between men and women through public policies, the existing gender disparities will persist. The current economic crisis in Nigeria has resulted in the retrenchment of workers, a fall in value of the naira, spiral inflationary trends, and a fall in standard of living. Under such economic realities, most parents are not only persistence of gender gaps in education but have also been unable to bear the cost of education. They, therefore tend to become selective about which sex among the children should be trained.

The burden of education is shared between the government and households, with government paying for the bulk of educational expenditure. In 1992, the household was responsible for about 8.0 percent while the remaining 92 percent was borne by government (World bank 1994). However, government expenditure on public education accounted for a mere 2.9 percent of Gross Domestic product (GNP) in 1992. It is an indication of gross under-funding. In spite of such gross under-funding, tertiary education from which the women benefit very minimally, absorb a disproportionately large share of the meager allocations. The lower levels, particularly the primary level which benefits a preponderant female population, receive the least. Thus, if the formal education of women is caught by a web of constraints, there is an option open for them in resource development and skill acquisition in the informal sector, based on the assumption that they would have acquired basic education at least.

3.0 Different Skills that are Available for Self-sustenance

The goals of modern societies are political, social, cultural and economic. Thus, human resources training and development is a necessary condition for achieving all these goals. Odekunle (1992), demonstrated that human resources development is crucial to any economy. He noted that human resources development is a process of increasing the knowledge, the skills and the capacities of most people in a society. The informal sector is quite distinct in this regard. Hart (1973) described the informal sector by its characteristics such as ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of the enterprise, small scale operation, labour intensiveness and adaptive technology, skill acquired outside the formal school system and unregulated as well as competitive markets. In assessing the training and skill development within the context of informal sector, Odetola (1990) opined that there is wide range of training requirements. Hence, while training is important, it is not sufficient to develop the individuals attached to it. It must include assistance in mobilization of institutional support both at the grassroots and governmental levels. In this regard, governments, both State and Federal, have established various skill acquisition centres across the country. Various business methods and skills are taught and the learners are assisted at the end to be independent.

The skills that can be acquired are categorized thus: technical skills, managerial skills, financial skills and entrepreneurial skills. The chart below shows the skills and where they are acquired as well as their percentages shares.

S/NO	SKILLS	PLACE OF AQUISITION	%
1	Calculating	At school	76
2	Using calculator	“	53
3	Writing	“	62
4	Reading	“	54
5	Negotiating with suppliers (marketing)	During apprenticeship/on the job	68
6	Training workers	“	60
7	Managing credit	“	57
8	Advertising of product	“	48
9	Keeping written account	“	61
10	Costing the product	“	57
11	Use of new machine	“	56
12	Use of raw materials	“	54
13	Repairing of machine	“	61

Source: Odekunle, S. O. (2000). Skill Acquisition as a determination of entrepreneurship success in Nigeria.

There is no activity that can be performed in any situation without some kind of skills and how to perform it. The knowledge of how to carryout the activity is a by-product of general education usually by being able to apply the knowledge from general education to specific conditions. The success of skill acquisition, to some extent, depends on the depth of education received at school and the degree to which the individual can adapt or apply his knowledge to the specific condition.

According to the chart, apart from the conventional schools, another means of acquiring skill of performing an activity is by learning the specific technicalities under the auspices and tutelage of an instructor. This might be necessary because the activity has to be performed using appropriate tools and machines. The learning of some activities is best carried out on the job because the more one practices, the more he is opened to more knowledge and the more he becomes more experienced and skillful.

3.1 Means of Skill Acquisition

3.1.1 Family Training

In our traditional setting, a family can be identified by a particular line of business or skill(s). Such skills could be taught to the younger generation for the purpose of survival and self sustenance. For instance, a father whose occupation was weaving, carpentry or blacksmithing would stress the importance of these jobs to his son. Usually a father would let his son to realize that in order to survive, the son must not only master, but must also be willing to do his father's job (Okorie and Ezeji, 1988). Apparently, on the job training is predominantly the system of mastering the acts or techniques of operations by the youth. in all these the emphasis is on the utilization of skill as a tool for survival.

3.1.2 Apprenticeship System:

Apprenticeship has been defined as an arrangement under which an infant or an adult, male or female, bonds himself to serve and learn for a definite time from a master, who on his side covenants to teach his trade or calling to the apprentice (Okorie and Ezeji, 1988). The aim is to train the apprentice systematically for a trade or occupation in which skill is required, or as a domestic servant, for any term not exceeding five years. In many cases, the students or apprentice pay fees for learning the trade, although some masters provide their apprentices with cash occasionally. They learn from their master or other people using their eyes, ears, and hands constantly in the course of production and service. The apprentices acquire their skills during apprenticeship and are at the same time internalizing the values and self-image of the craftsman they will eventually become after their apprenticeship.

3.1.3 Methods of Skill Acquisition

Some skill acquisition explained above is a function of the method of instruction, and variety of works available to the master/tutor; the quality and quantity of the tools and equipment used, and the duration of training and the receptivity of the methods of acquiring vocational skills. The method of instruction asking question, attending a course method employed to transmit skills also involves in order to create participatory education, which involves role playing and doing.

4.0 Skill Development In Women

Skill development, according to Okorie and Ezeji (1988), (i) involves muscular dexterity (ii) must lend itself to the coordination of activities, (iii) requires that the amount of work to do should be performed with competency (iv) implies that performance should be by keen sense of direction, pressure and a great deal of relaxation and must have some intellectual content (v) emphasizes accuracy as an important characteristic.

Thus, there is need to develop women on various occupational skills for self-sustenance. This is so because real growth must begin from the base. Small businesses provide the relevant inputs necessary for the development of large businesses. It also provides a potential ground for entrepreneurial development and creates mass jobs at the base of the social and economic structure because it is labour intensive. It will also help to develop the private sector, which encourages mobilization of resources, effective distribution of income and creation of wealth.

Skill development in women creates business methods and or opportunities for their self-sustenance. Therefore, the following are the various types of business opportunities for women:

1. **Distributive trade:** It is the commonest type of business because it requires low capital for a start. Examples are, petty trading, cloth-making, trinkets making and drinks making and selling.
2. **Distributorship:** women can use marketing skills to distribute raw materials to industries, like palm oil to soap making industries. They can supply rags to firms, sand to builders etc. However, all these require sound basic education.
3. **Agriculture:** This involves food production, animal husbandry, poultry and fishing.
4. **Vocational Service:** Furniture/carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking and block moulding. These businesses require specialized skills for their establishment. Women can employ skilled labour and manage such businesses.
5. **Industrial Enterprise:** These are manufacturing and service businesses. They are capital intensive and take a long time to break-even.

6 Light Enterprises: This includes textiles, catering, plastic, foot wear and hairdressing. Though, these are labour intensive, they are options open for self sustenance.

Furthermore, in a bid to educate/develop women in business methods, various programmes have been organized in the past and presently to that effect. Such programmes include better life programme for rural women and League of Peculiar Andoni women (LOPAD). The family support programme also conducted some training programmes and workshops for women vocational skills development. Some of the skills taught in such programmes are banking, general catering, soap making, pomade making, wine making, crafts, wigs, bead work (necklaces, beaded bags), weaving, mat making, hat making and many more.

4.1 Importance Of Skill Development In Women

4.1.1 The Economy

Women as producers of wealth have frequently been ignored or undervalued. For a variety of reasons, many women are obliged at some point in their lives to support themselves and their children. Food production or processing are two areas from which women have traditionally earned income. Although little recognition is given to women's role in agriculture, it has been estimated that women constitute over 40% of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa (Paul, 1990). The link between farmer education and farmer efficiency suggests that more education for women could be expected to bring improved agricultural yields. For instance, in Nigeria, in an area where women formed between 60 and 80 percent of the labour force in agriculture, a study showed that losses due to faulty cultivation and conservation techniques could be substantially reduced if women were given sufficient basic education in business and agricultural skills.

4.1.2 Women's Autonomy

The quality of women's participation in development will not improve while they remain dependent on others who have some education or exclusively on male leadership. For example, women's income generating projects need access to banks and credit facilities. But this is difficult or sometimes impossible in the absence of literate women members to keep records and to negotiate with the financial institutions.

Moreover, there is evidence from many states in Nigeria that an increasing number of women can neither depend on their husbands nor on the extended family for their income. Some must find work because the family cannot survive solely on the income of the husbands. Education empowers women to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens of their society and enable them to make more informed choices. The right to use credit or own land is diminished if they cannot read or do simple arithmetic. Their success in business is also dependent on their acquisition of basic education.

4.1.3 Implications For Vocational Education

The development of viable vocational skills and business methods cannot be left to chance. Programmes that reflect an increasing emphasis on individual interest, talents, achievement and capabilities will require careful planning and the involvement of professional educators, specialist, lay persons, parents and trainees/students. For educating/developing women in business method for self-sustenance, the following are the implications to vocational education.

(1) There is need to shift the salient emphasis of skill acquisition to develop a simple paradigm of what constitutes the skills and the process of acquiring these skills; knowledge of how raw materials, machines, tools and appliances are procured and used, knowledge of

marketing and simple accounting, knowledge of the techniques involved in the execution of technical tasks associated with the work for which the skill is needed

(2) Development programmes cannot be executed without skilled manpower. Thus, every reasonable effort must be made to resuscitate vocational-technical education by providing for the learning of skills for the use of tools, machines and materials of the occupation.

(3) The quantity and quality of the tools, how and when they are used, are critical indicators for competence and expertise in skill acquisition in vocational education.

(4) The extent of skill and technical knowledge required varies with specific occupations. Those concerned with design, manufacture, sale, installation and servicing of a wide range of products, require more manipulative skills than those skills necessary to handle tools and instruments properly. Therefore, the teacher must use the strategy that best defines that occupation in the process of tutelage/teaching.

(5) A vocational education teacher should consider the nature of skill and the psychological conditions requisite for the building of needed occupational skills.

(6) The pre-occupation should not be to teach skills but to help women acquire skills.

(7) To complete the training of the women in any skill that is saleable in occupational life, part of the practice must be had under actual production conditions, either in the school workshop or during industrial attachment.

(8) There is also the need for vocational guidance. Since education, counseling, training and development, to enable the women acquire and develop business skills. Therefore, guidance personnel, consultants and advisory services should be employed when necessary.

(9) The curriculum of the vocational education should be restructured so as to accommodate the informal and small-scale operators.

(10) Women should be taught sound human relations so as to enhance their entrepreneurial skills.

5.0 Conclusion

On the whole, in order to attain a satisfactory rate of economic development, our educational efforts must be geared towards a massive education for skill development. Thus, the training of women to acquire various skills and the identification as well as development of entrepreneurship skills should be the primary objectives of human resources development for small-scale enterprises, especially in the informal sector. In the process of skills acquisition, the quality of the skills acquired in any trade is determined by the quality and quantity of tools and equipment available to the teacher, tutor or master and the acquisition of basic formal education.

The involvement of women in skills acquisition have been on the increase in recent times; and more efforts are being made to incorporate more of them into the programme. This results in self reliance, self-employment, self sufficiency and self-actualization of the women. The beneficiaries (women) are to be self-employed so that they become job-creators instead of idle minds and job seekers. Thus, every societal norms and cultural values which have hitherto inhibited women must be removed for their self-sustenance.

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