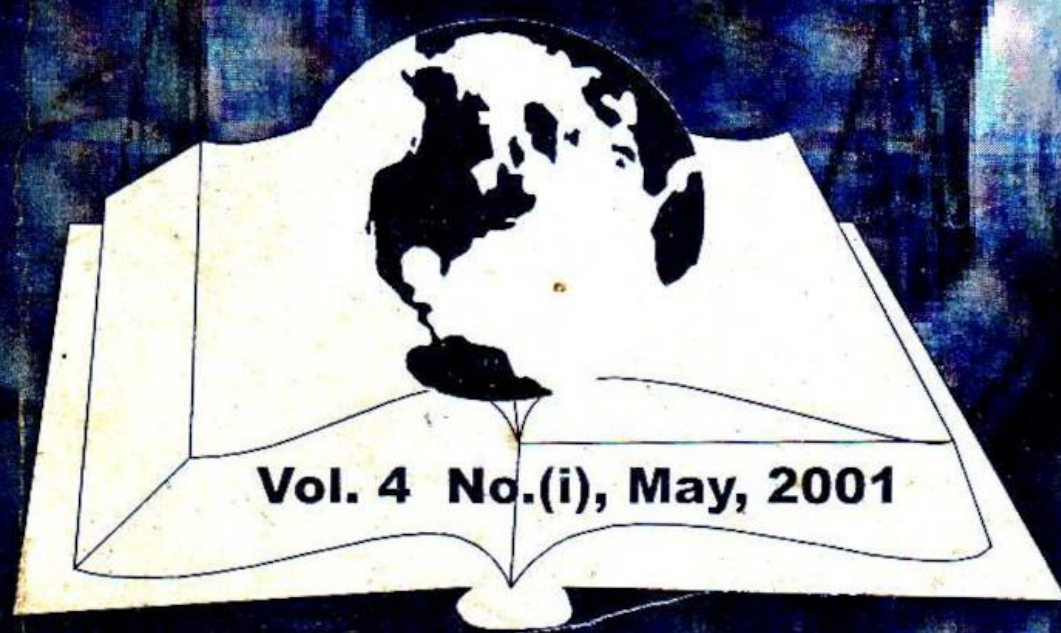


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SKILLS ACQUISITION IN THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE WITHOUT GENDER BIAS.

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Abstract

The teaching of agricultural science with gender bias is a serious problem affecting the interest of female students in the choice of agriculture as a career and in their performance in agricultural science examinations. The teacher, schools and Government have important role to pay in order to achieve gender equality in the school system in general. In the teaching of agricultural science, the teacher should be skillful and build up new minds to accommodate the teaching of both boys and girls with similar interest, determination and expectation. Teaching agriculture without gender bias should form part of teaching effectiveness.

Introduction

Gender is used to describe those characters of men and women which are socially determined in contrast to those which are biologically determined (UNESCO 1997). Biologically, women give birth to children while men produce sperms.

The gender inequality as reported by UNESCO (1997) are manifested in many ways in developing countries. These include:

- About 70 – 90% of women live and work in rural areas.
- In Africa women produce 60 – 80% of food for home consumption.
- Women tend to spend more time in the farm than men.
- Women are marginalized in profitable employment, politics and education among others.
- In Asia, women make up to 60% of agricultural workers.

The above listed biases are indications that gender insensitivity is highly rooted in our society. Does gender bias exist in the school system? In the school system is it only limited to school administration?

The teacher in the classroom unconsciously operates gender bias in his day-to-day activities. The implication is manifested in the higher rate of success or failure of a particular sex which females are mostly the victims in Nigeria.

In the teaching of agricultural science, female students tend to view farming operations as being tedious, unpleasant and commonly practised by poor rural dwellers. Consequently, very few agriculturists are women in developing countries. It is observed that very few female agricultural science teachers could put their profession into commercial practice. Even in the school they reluctantly administer practical activities with serious concern. Agricultural science teachers transfer the gender activities of the larger society into school system. Greater attention and interest are given to male students by male teachers.

In the light of the above, there is no balance in the teaching – learning process in agricultural science in the school system and there is need to develop skills in the teaching of agricultural science with gender sensitivity.

GENDER ROLE IN FARMING ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

In Akwa Ibom State, Abia, Cross River, Rivers etc. men and women are involved in agricultural activities. However, strenuous farm operations like clearing of thick bush and tillage are carried out mostly by men and their participation gradually ceases during the growth period of the crops. The degree of women participation in agricultural activities is influenced by customs, values, educational status, labour cost, household income, and availability of men among others.

In Akwa Ibom State the gender role in farming activities is presented in table 1.

Table 1. gender role in farming activities in Akwa Ibom State

Agricultural activities and Enterprises dominated by males	Agricultural activities and Enterprises dominated by females
- Land preparation	- Seedsowing
- Staking	- Weeding
- Fence making	- Tending of crops
- Fishing	- Irrigation of dry season crops
- Slaughtering of animals	- Processing of garri, palm fruit
- Harvesting of palm fruits	- Collecting of palm fruits
- Tapping of raphia palm and rubber	- Local goat rearing
- Flower raising	- Fish smoking
- Pig keeping	- Winnowing of rice
- Poultry keeping	- Sales of fruits and vegetables.

Source: Ekpo (2001) Field Survey.

The foregoing is to illustrate the involvement of men and women in farming activities. There is need for gender awareness in both the larger society and in the institutions learning since skills and acquisitions cannot be achieved in the face of no-going gender inequality in the school system.

Table 2 indicates the ongoing gender role in the school system. The role play by boys and girls are not biologically determined. They are socially and culturally constructed. What is obtained in a larger community is transferred to the school system. School leadership is dominated by boys while girls are assigned to tidy up the classrooms, animal and the offices.

Girls spend much of their time to do weeding and singing during practical agriculture and their leisure time respectively. In secondary and primary schools the male Agricultural science teacher is the labour master and could not differentiate between practical agriculture and the general sanitation of the school popularly known as compound work.

In the class, teachers direct standard questions to boys and sometimes none to the girls. Boys are encouraged to read medicine, accounting, law, agriculture, engineering, physics, chemistry and mathematics while very few girls can compete with the boys in sciences, majority are encouraged to pursue nursing, home economics, English and English literature among others.

Table 2: Gender role in mixed primary/post-primary schools in Akwa Ibom State.

School appointment/activities dominated by either sex

- Males	- Females
- School labour master and offices	- Leaders of classroom
- Group leader	- Sanitation
- Young farmers Association	- School choir group
- Game captain	- Engage in dull games
- Layout of the school farm	- sowing of crops
- Land preparation	- Weeding
- Compost making	- Sitting at the front of
the class	
- In the classroom boys sit at the back	- Involve in craft
design work	
- Involve in craft construction work	- Pursues arts oriented
disciplines	
- Pursue science oriented disciplines.	

Source: Ekpo (2001) Field Survey.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The gender inequality emanates and becomes rooted in the larger society and progresses to educational institutions. The following educational implications are a few to mention.

In 1995, 25.09% of girls in Nigeria who should have enrolled in school did not and great inequality also exists in the development of secondary levels of education. In addition, Nigeria has a high dropout rate in schools. Most girls leave school due to inability to pay costs, distance or inaccessibility, religious factors, early marriage or sickness (vollman 2001). Today it is believed that the higher the level of education of the mothers the greater the chances that their daughters will have access to and remain in basic education. Unfortunately, Nigeria has more illiterate hence girls education is proportionately affected.

About 80 million girls have no access to primary education. Similarly 350 million women are illiterate while 100 million children and adults do not complete their basic schooling in the developing countries (UNESCO/UNICEF 1995).

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The high rural population in Nigeria is an indication that there is more chances of illiterate citizens except they embrace the adult education for all mothers and fathers. In Akwa Ibom State most female rural dwellers engage in farming activities as means of livelihood. Women (66.7%) in particular are more involved in vegetable production than men (33.3%) (Ekpo 1997).

In Eastern and southern Nigeria, Female Teachers concentrate more in the primary school system than men. This is an indication that they few women have the higher qualification to teach in tertiary institutions.

Poor response to adult education programme in many parts of the state. Unfortunately very few mothers voluntarily embraced the adult education programme in rural areas. It is difficult for rural women to accomplish the daily routine of fetching water, fuel wood, attending to both farming activities and the domestic affairs and also caring for the poor children and then prepare their minds for classroom activities.

The point here is that social and culture barriers, poverty and ignorance are to be blamed as the causes of women backwards in education politic and economic realities of life. In the light of the above, gender awareness becomes the maiden weapon to tackle the gender inequality.

Gender awareness: This is the development of new and better minds towards the prevalent social and economic role of women in the society in the overall political, educational and socio-cultural advantage of national development. Gender awareness is necessary in both the wider society and the school system. The wider society is the root source of gender inequality. The school system only practices what is already in the community.

There is need for the school to include gender sensitivity in its social role and in the curriculum.

In the teaching of agricultural science, the teacher should build up new minds to accommodate the teaching of both boys and girls with similar interest, determination and expectation. Therefore, teaching, agriculture without gender bias should form part of teaching effectiveness.

A teacher should note that gentleness, quietness, submissiveness and emotion are the common attributes of females while curiosity, authority, aggressiveness, talkativeness and less emotion are the attributes of most males to pursue gender sensitive teaching methodology.

SKILLS REQUIREMENT TO ACHIEVE TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS WITHOUT GENDER BIAS

Teacher is the center point in the gender issue in the school.

A change in the attitude of teachers to adopt gender sensitive teaching methodology becomes necessary. Teachers should understand the plight of the women for years of their discrimination and the adverse implication in the society. Male teachers should put themselves in the same shoes with females and prepare themselves to handle the situation with determination and sincerity.

Teachers should utilize skills which would help to increase academic performance for female skills to improve the access, retention, performance, progression and academic achievement of girls in schools. Hence the following skills should be intensified.

The use of instructional materials to embrace the girls and boys appreciation. Illustration in the course of teaching to portray boys in a higher position against the wishes of female counterparts should be discouraged. For example, a male doctor is illustrated to treat a poor market women or a poor female hair dresser.

Questions should be directed to both boys and in terms of frequency and standard. A female student should not be ridiculed when a question is attempted. A teacher should try to reject the questions and make it to suit the correct one. Let the student know that the answer was not correct.

Teacher-student relationship should not discriminate sex.

A male teacher should endeavour to develop self-confidence in girls.

Gender issues should be given to the students as tests and assignment to foster gender awareness.

Teachers should encourage boys and girls equally to pursue medicine, engineering, law, accounting, surveying, building technology, agriculture etc.

Teachers should involve boys in the activity captivity carried by the majority of women in the wider society. For examples:

- raising of vegetables;
- fetching of water;
- cleaning of animal pens and even classroom;
- give them assignment on debate like men cook better than women.

Class jokes and pictures relating to sex should be properly guided.

Teacher should exclusively work hand-in-hand with to pursue science courses with ease and interest.

Teachers should break sex-role stereotype to involve boys in textile design and girls in construction work and vice – versa.

Locate specific and convenient time for practical agriculture and the teacher must be present to carryout supervision accordingly and above all, encourage the female students to perform just like their male counterparts.

Teacher should present awards to the best boys and girls in agricultural examinations and in the skills development in the practical agriculture. This practice would encourage favorably competition among the learners.

Teachers should avoid foul language which reflects bias against women even when the girls cannot measure up with the boys academically.

Male teachers should respect womanhood and avoid their humiliation in the course of performing their duties.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL TO COMBAT GENDER BIAS IN THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURE.

Teachers cannot accomplish the gender awareness in isolation. The school authority should also appreciate the gender sensitivity. The following school policies would contribute to find gender sensitivity a place in the school system. The school authority should:

Involve female teachers as much as possible in practical agriculture to serve as encouragement to the female students. Surprisingly, in primary and secondary schools most teachers appointed to head agricultural practical are called compound work masters and they are males. Consequently, the female students are not aspired as much as their male counterparts, in agricultural science as a means of livelihood.

Spread and implement gender sensitivity in leadership role as mandatory policies.

Direct teachers on the problem solving issues involving boys and girls equally.

School meetings including parents teachers Association should be used as channels for the spread of gender awareness.

Career guidance and counseling on the choice of vocational carrier in the case of counseling the female students should be carried out by female teachers.

The approach will help to motivate the female students to appreciate vocational education.

THE EXPECTED ROLE OF GOVERNMENT TO COMBAT GENDER BIAS IN THE TEACHING OF AGRICULTURE

It is the government that employs teachers, builds school and formulates education policies.

The following measures can be taken by government to ensure gender equality in the school system.

- Should encourage women education through liberal scholarship to pursue agriculture and other related disciplines.
- International organizations should involve various arms of government in Nigeria to organize seminars and workshops for school teachers and top government officials to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women through gender education.
- Protection of women right to land and income as integral part of agricultural development.
- Promotion of women to position of power at every level within all political and legislative bodies in order to achieve equality with men.
- Dropped out females from school should be trained in vocational skills like agriculture and government should back-up their employment in agricultural sectors. Alternatively, liberal provision of credit and subsidy of agricultural inputs should be applicable by government to encourage a programme of female agricultural programme.
- Provision of adult education for illiterates females with bias in agriculture and thereafter provide employment opportunities for them.
- Government should plan, execute and monitor programme for promoting job security for females of agricultural graduates.
- Federal, state and Local government should control the rate of abuse of females as house girls in low paid or low status work.

CONCLUSION:

Teaching agricultural science without bias requires a skillful teacher in the handling of lesson, Instructional materials, classroom administration among others. Schools and Government at all levels are equally very important to encourage the females students to develop interest in vocational education.

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