Gender Equality for Sustainable Development through Open and Distance Education in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

To create a just and sustainable world and to enhance women’s roles in sustaining their families and their communities, achieving gender equality is paramount. The purpose of this study therefore is to uncover the role of Open and Distance Education in ensuring Gender Equality for Sustainable Development in Rivers State. A descriptive survey design was employed. 100 NCE students were randomly selected from a total population of 1,702 students of National Teachers Institute (NTI). Data was collected using a questionnaire tagged (AGETDE) this was validated by experts and a reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained. Two research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions the hypotheses were also tested. The Findings showed that there is significant relationship between Gender Equality and Education of women in Rivers state. The study concluded that Distance Education has the potential of providing alternative means of Education for women and thereby achieving Gender Equality in the state. As Distance Education is an alternative means of educating disadvantaged women, especially in the rural and remote areas of the state, the study recommended that better opportunities should be provided for women by increasing the number of institutions that can provide distance education in the state. E-Learning should also be adopted to facilitate learning for easier access and better management of studies.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, Distance Education, Women, Rivers State.

Introduction

Enalcachew (2016) asserts that “achieving sustainable development without women is like clapping with one hand” In other words without the inclusion of women in all areas of developmental initiatives, sustainable development cannot be achieved. To this end, UN women (2014) outlined that to create a just and sustainable world and to enhance women’s role in sustaining their families and communities, achieving gender equality is paramount. According to UNICEF, gender equality "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights and resources." On a global scale, achieving gender equality also requires eliminating harmful practices against women and girls, including sex trafficking, femicide, wartime sexual violence, and other oppression tactics. One of the foremost global goals in the pursuit of sustainable development all over the world is the elimination of gender disparity. The United
Nations Sustainable Development Goal UN (SDG 2030) number five aims to end discrimination toward women and provide them equal opportunities for education and employment.

A woman’s education is imperative to the advancement and development of her community and country as a whole. Improving women’s education can bring tremendous development in a country’s economy and society Zymaris (2016). Women’s education is a strategic development priority. In Nigeria, gender based discrimination and inequalities are apparent, statistics show that of the 774 million illiterate adults worldwide, 64 percent are women – a statistic virtually unchanged from the early 1990s (Gender Statistics, 2010). This disparity in the education of women in Nigeria is corroborated by Olumuyinwa A., Segun I., Comfort O. & Aderemi A. (2019). As a result, low empowerment and high gender gap still exist which hinder the process of development in the nation. In Rivers state, gender inequality is evident in the economy, political structure as well as in social development, therefore this study reveals the need to achieve gender equality through distance education and thereby empower women in Rivers state for sustainable development.

Sustainable Development

The concept of development has evolved over the years to what is perceived to be sustainable development today, Murphy (2012). Sustainable development is that development which meets the need of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs while attempting to meet our own needs, guaranteeing the balance between economic growth, care for the environment and social well-being, WCED (1987). Many of the challenges facing humankind, such as, inequality, poverty, environmental hazards among others can only be resolved at a global level and by promoting sustainable development: a commitment to social progress, environmental balance and economic growth. According to Warth & Koparnova (2012), sustainable development is hinged on three interrelated pillars, economic development, social development and environmental protection. According to these scholars the goal and indeed the ultimate test of sustainable development is the convergence among the three trajectories of economic growth, social development and environmental protection. This shows that sustainable development can be achieved if and only if these three elements are satisfied cumulatively.

As a part of a new sustainable development roadmap, the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda, which contains the Sustainable Development Goals, a call to action to protect the planet and guarantee the global well-being of people. UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aims to promote gender equality and empower women and therefore uses education as its target and the measure of gender disparity in education as its indicator of progress, which is why the SDG (2030) itself has a stand-alone goal for Education. (SDG 4) Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which is defined as education that encourages changes in knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable a more sustainable and equitable society. ESD aims to empower and equip current and future generations to meet their needs using a balanced and integrated approach to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development (UNESCO).
Distance Education

One major yardstick for measuring attainment of the sustainable development goals in each country of the world is Education. However with Nigeria being the most populous nation in sub-Saharan Africa with about 140 million people (NPC, 2007), occupying a landmass of about 923,768 square kilometers and with over 274 ethnic groups making up the federation, 36 states and federal capital territory one of which is Rivers State, situated in the South-South Zone and administratively divided into 23 LGAs, and a total population of 5,198,716 (NPC 2007) with an annual growth rate of about 3.41% and over 7 million from 2016 estimate. With this growth rate, there’s a need for an alternative means of providing education for all so as to achieve sustainable development. Distance education is an alternative to formal classroom education of the teeming population of the nation.

Rudolf (2010) said, Distance education is a planned and systematic activity which comprises the choice, didactic preparation and presentation of teaching materials as well as the supervision and support of student learning and which is achieved by bridging the physical distance between student and teacher by means of at least one appropriate technical medium. For Moore (1994), the related concept of “distance teaching” is defined as the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviors are executed apart from the learning behaviors, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner’s presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices. The United States Distance Learning Association defines distance learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other form.

The primary rationale for introducing Distance Education is to democratize education, so that it covers large segments of population, vocations and professions. Its emphasis is on innovation, flexibility and cost effectiveness. According to Daniel (2015), Open and Distance Learning offers a number of advantages to learners one of which is to provide easy access to education to different sections of society, especially to those with seemingly geographical isolation & difficulty, and caters to the educational needs of the target groups through the open systems of learning. In this case the target group is the women, especially those who were married at earlier age and unable to complete their education as well as those women who are weighed down by domesticity and so wish to have an alternative to traditional form of education. Distance Education has been approached from several theories, one of which is the industrialization theory. Peters (1988), developed a view of distance education as an industrialized form of teaching and learning, which makes it possible for a lot of people to access education at the same time.

In Nigeria, quite a handful of institutions offer distance Education. Among which are:

- Ahmadu Bello University, which offers a special training programme called: “The Correspondence and Teachers’ In-service Programmes (TISEP), established in 1976 to prepare middle level teachers for Nigeria’s primary schools.

- The Distance Learning Centre (DLC), which was established by the University of Ibadan’s Senate in 1988.

- The University of Abuja established its Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education in 1992.

- The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) which was established in 2001.
Private entities also engage in providing distance learning that include professional bodies and governmental institutions and lastly

The first independent institution dedicated solely to distance education, the National Teachers’ Institute (NTI), which was officially established in 1978 to upgrade unqualified teachers.

The National Teachers’ Institute, Kaduna is a single mode distance education institution dedicated to teacher training. It was established in 1976 by the Federal Government primarily because of the pressing needs in the country for trained and qualified teaching staff at all levels of the educational system. Act No. 7 of 10th April 1978 establishing the Institute charged it among others with the responsibility of: providing courses of instruction leading to the development, upgrading and certification of teachers as specified in the relevant syllabus using distance education techniques.

At the moment NTI offers NCE, Post Graduate Diploma Degree in Education, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Pivotal Teacher Training Program, and recently Bachelor’s degree program. There are eighteen different study centers in Rivers state. 14 NCE centers, 3 PGDE centers as well as 1 B.Ed. Center. The table below shows the number of women that got alternative means of education through NTI in the said period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,894</td>
<td>3,521</td>
<td>2,788</td>
<td>1,973</td>
<td>2,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,046</td>
<td>3,706</td>
<td>2,898</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>2,744</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender Equality

Gender Equality according to the Webster dictionary, is the state of having the same rights, status and opportunities as others regardless of one’s gender. It is the state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender. Holzner et al., (2010) posit that gender equality is a situation where .... “all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by strict gender roles”. Alvarez &Lopez (2013) identify the ultimate goal of gender equality as the non - existence of discrimination on the basis of one’s gender. Gender equality is therefore achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision making and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored. Gender equality is more than equal representation; it is strongly tied to women's rights, and often requires policy changes.

As of 2017, gender equality is the fifth of seventeen sustainable development goals of the United Nations. When women have equal rights with their men counterparts they become empowered. According to Bayeh (2016) empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Kabeer (2016) posits that Women's empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be,
do, and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society, all of these can be achieved when there is gender equality.

How is Gender Equality Measured?

Gender equality is measured by looking at the representation of men and of women in a range of roles. A number of international comparative gender equality indices also exist which offer a way to comparing a country’s achievements in terms of Gender Equality with those of other countries. Each index looks at a distinct list of parameters and the choice of parameters affects the outcome for each country. These include among other indices;

- **The United Nations Gender Inequality Index**; which is based on the premise that more often than not, women and girls are discriminated against in health, education and the labour market.

- **The Global Gender Gap Report**; introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, is another framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities which benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria. This Index looks at economic participation and

- **Opportunity Deviation**; educational attainment deviation; health and survival deviation and political empowerment deviation.

- **Social Watch Gender Equity Index**: Social Watch is a network comprised by national coalitions of civil society organizations. The Social Watch gender equality index is based on the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment. In summary, the aforementioned indices basically considered deviation in terms of Education, health, Economy and Political participation.

While many gains have been made with regards to overall level of education worldwide and more children than ever are now attending primary school (King, 2013), According to Statistics on Education Nigeria (2007), in Rivers state primary and secondary school enrollment for girls was higher than that of boys. Nevertheless Gender inequality in tertiary education is extreme as shown in the research conducted by Olumuyiwa, O., et al. (2019)

**Table II: Descriptive statistics of candidates admitted into Nigerian tertiary (2010 -2015)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3831.89</td>
<td>5475.92</td>
<td>993.97</td>
<td>1592.97</td>
<td>4536.95</td>
<td>6256.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1420.00</td>
<td>13.073</td>
<td>12.622</td>
<td>12.602</td>
<td>12.650</td>
<td>12.673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>12.598</td>
<td>12.922</td>
<td>3223</td>
<td>3946</td>
<td>13.069</td>
<td>18.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>12.601</td>
<td>12.996</td>
<td>3244</td>
<td>3970</td>
<td>13.114</td>
<td>18.996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source**: Olumuyiwa A., Segun I., Comfort O. & Aderemi A. (2019) 920-933

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number of candidates admitted into all accredited universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education across the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Territory as obtained from JAMB shows huge gender disparity in admission. In each of the six-year period, the number of males admitted into the various higher institutions of learning in Nigeria is consistently higher than that of their female counterparts. Hence, the need to examine and address the issues surrounding poor education of women in our society cannot be overemphasized. Several reasons have been adduced to the cause of the gender disparity in education in Nigeria. Early marriages and cumbrances with domesticity, teenage pregnancies, cultural belief that women are of less value than men, as well as poverty are primary. This study focuses on bridging the gap in tertiary education through Distance Education in Rivers State.

**Why achieve Gender Equality?**

Gender Equality benefits everyone, which is why it has been nominated as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal UN (SDG) number five, Sustainable development Goal which aims to ending discrimination toward women and providing equal opportunities for education and employment. Gender equality stimulates economic growth. According to Alvarez & Lopez (2013), Gender Equality is a precondition for and an indicator of sustainable development. In essence, for the effective and sustainable economic growth of any country or community, the equal participation of both sexes are crucial. Therefore ‘struggling to bring about economic growth with the recognition of men’s efforts only is like clapping with one hand’ Endalcachew (2016). Without the inclusion of women in all areas of development initiatives, the three interrelated pillars of sustainable development can never be achieved. These are economic development, social development as well as environmental protection. UN women (2007), UN women (2014).UN Women reported that in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, half of the economic growth over the past 50 years is attributed to girls having better access to education, as well as increases in the number of years of schooling between girls and boys.

**Statement of the Problem**

Rivers State is situated in the South-South Zone and administratively divided into 23 LGAs. The total population from the 2006 census was 2,673,026 males and 2,525,690 females, which at an annual growth rate of about 3.41 %. 2016 estimate put the number of residents of Rivers State at over 7 million. As of 2006 Rivers State has higher literacy rate compared to most states in the South South geopolitical zone. Its male literacy was 52.3% while female literacy rate was 47.7% (wikipedia). Like other states in Nigeria, female literacy is low. When women are not educated they are less able to access health care neither are they able to take decision that will affect their children and their household positively health wise. While Rivers state women are intelligent and hardworking their participation in the state’s economy is minimal due to the literacy level. A lot of Rivers women are involved In small trading such as farming, “bole vendors”, meat, pepper, selling, and other petty trading, whereas with quality education they can do so much more. Women in Rivers State are almost not represented in political structure of the state. For instance, from the statistics of the House of Assembly in Rivers state from 1999-2019 below;
Table III: Members of the fourth assembly – the ninth assembly (1999-2019) Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSEMBLY</th>
<th>4TH</th>
<th>5TH</th>
<th>6TH</th>
<th>7TH</th>
<th>8TH</th>
<th>9TH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source; House of Assembly Rivers State

From all indices of measuring gender equality considered in Rivers State, it is obvious that there is no gender parity in the state. United Nations Sustainable Development Goal five focuses on ending discrimination toward women and providing equal opportunities for education and employment. Since admission into tertiary institution is low for females in the nation and in Rivers state, what is the alternative means of providing education for the women of Rivers State? Such that the state can attain sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study is to determine the following:

i. To determine the extent to which distance education provide an alternative source of education to women in Rivers state.

ii. To find out if education provided women through distance learning can bridge the gap in gender equality?

Research Questions

The following research questions were adopted;

a. To what extent does distance education provide alternative means of education for women in Rivers State?

b. To what extent does education provided bridge the gap in gender inequality in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The under listed hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant relationship between distance education and women’s education in Rivers State.

2. There is no significant relationship between women education and gender equality in Rivers State.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 1,702, NTI (NCE 1- NCE 4) students 2018/2019 Academic session in Rivers State. 100 students were selected through random sample. Data was obtained using an instrument adopted by the researcher tagged: ‘Questionnaire on Achieving Gender Equality through Distance Education’ (QAGEDE) which consist of three sections; section A was demographic data, section B, consist of items on education of Rivers state women and section C was on promoting gender equality in Rivers State through education, both items were rated on a 4 point scale from
very high extent – very low extent. Experts in the faculty of education validated the instrument. Direct approach was employed to data collection for the study. Percentages, mean standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while Pearson moment correlation was employed to analyze hypotheses.

1. To what extent does distance education provide alternative means of education for women in Rivers State?

Table IV: No. of Respondents =100

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Fx</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher.

Where; X means 4= Very high extent, 3= high extent 2 = Low extent, 1= very low extent
F = Frequency, % = Percentages, fx = mean, SD = Standard deviation

From the above table IV, data collected were analyzed using percentages mean and standard deviation. The mean of the 4 rating Likert scale is 2.50 for the purpose of this study, a mean rating of 2.51 or above was regarded as significant while a mean rating of less than 2.50 was regarded as insignificant in explaining the changes in the variables under study. The mean arrived at is 3.37 which is above the criterion mean of 2.51. Also from the table 80 percent of the respondents agreed that to a high extent Distance Education provides alternative means of educating Rivers state women.

2. To what extent does Education bridge the gap in Gender Equality in Rivers State?

Table V: No of Respondents=100

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>X</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Fx</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher

From the above table V, data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. 70 of the respondents agreed that Education has the potential of achieving Gender Equality for sustainable development in Rivers state. While the mean of 4 rating Lykert scale is 2.50. For the purpose of this study, a mean rating of 2.51 or above was regarded as significant while a mean rating of less than 2.50 was regarded as insignificant in explaining the changes of the variables under study. The mean arrived at is 3.20 which is above the criterion mean of 2.51 therefore to a high extent distance education can be used to bridge the gap in gender equality in Rivers State.
Hypotheses: The under listed hypotheses were tested;

1. There is no significant relationship between distance education and women’s education in Rivers State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distance Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher

Where; SA= Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD1 = Strongly Disagreed, X = Mean, SD2 = Standard deviation

The calculated mean based on responses for hypothesis 1 is 3.27 which is higher than the Standard Reference mean of 2.50. The standard Deviation is 3.36 Hence it can be inferred that there is a significant relationship between distance education and women’s education in Rivers State. This is to say that distance education provide opportunity for women who would otherwise have remain illiterates Therefore because the calculated mean is greater than the Standard Reference Mean the null hypothesis is rejected.

2. There is no significant relationship between women education and gender equality in Rivers State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women’s Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher

Where; SA= Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD1 = Strongly Disagreed, X = Mean, X2= SD2 = Standard deviation

The calculated mean based on responses for hypothesis 2 is 2.78 which is higher than the Standard Reference mean of 2.50. The standard Deviation is 5.1. Hence, it can be inferred that Women getting educated bridge the gap in gender inequality. Therefore because the calculated mean is greater than the Standard Reference Mean the null hypothesis is rejected.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Distance Education has the potential of providing Education for the large population of women who were disadvantaged in one way or another or who would by choice preferred distance education to Traditional mode of education. It was also established that with Education, Gender Equality can be achieved and hence Sustainable Development.
Recommendation

Based on the findings of the research the following recommendations were made:

- Since it is a well-established fact that the achievement of growth in the economy of the state is contingent upon the full use of the skills and qualification of women, Gender Equality should be encouraged in the state in order to achieve sustainable development.

- As Distance Education is an alternative means of educating disadvantaged women better opportunities should be provided by increasing the number of NTI centers in the state especially in the rural and remote areas of the state.

- E-Learning should be introduced to NTI as well as other institutions providing Distance Education for easier access and better management of studies. Private organizations should invest in providing Distance Education for the increasing population of Rivers State.

REFERENCES


