

Feminization of Skill Acquisition and Human Capital Development among Rural Women in Nigeria in COVID-19 Era

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Abstract

Feminization is the advancement of women interest with the mandate to empower them so that they can contribute meaningfully to societal development. This era of Covid-19 pandemic has thrown many women out of regular jobs. The Nigeria society is male dominated ranging from career profession to skill acquisition, politics and commerce. Only few women are trying to advance their course in their fields of endeavours, but more often, are relegated because of their gender. Although, the feminist movement is waving globally, but still at the rural areas in Nigeria, some customs and tradition relegating, reducing and limiting women are yet to be transcended for them to gain their rightful place and attention and contribute to rural development like their male counterparts. This paper analysed the consequences of neglecting rural women in skill acquisition and human capital development. It also display the benefits of engaging rural women in acquiring skills and the contributions of some notable Nigerian women to Nigeria's development. The human capital theory was used to explain the position of the paper.

Keywords: *Feminization, Rural Development, Skills Acquisition, and Human Capital Development.*

DOI [URL:https://doi.org/10.36758/ijapsm/v1n1.2021/1](https://doi.org/10.36758/ijapsm/v1n1.2021/1)

Introduction

Feminization is the clear shift in gender roles and sex roles in the society, group or organization with more attention to feminism. It also means the involvement of women into a group or profession that was usually dominated by the male folks (Ann, 1977). Women in the society have played key roles in the development of the global community, unfortunately in Nigeria, the female folks have faced series and systematic discrimination. Women have been relegated and confined to the kitchen and given of birth to children thereby killing their initiatives to contribute greatly to national development in Africa and Nigeria. This paper is narrowed down to women who reside in rural areas where traditions that inhibit women progress are practised. Rural areas are strategic to industrial growth and food production to the urban centres, therefore the need to ensure skills acquisition and human capital development is important. Although with the penetration of education which brought exposure, Christianity and government intervention, such inimical cultural practices are on the decline.

Women are special breeds and human race can come to extinction if they stop to give birth. The development of any country hinges on human capital development. According to Hajar

et al (2013), experiences abound that advanced countries and numerous studies in the view of context of economic growth of developing countries have displayed that economic growth is not only explained by physical capital and labour force, but also and very importantly, by human capital. Africa that is the birth place of ancient civilization is backward because the limited inclusion of women in the development of the continent. For Pritchest (2001), posits that, gender equality is an economic intelligence. Economic intelligence is quite necessary for development. The rural women that is the point of call here, the area is faced with serious neglect in terms of human capital and infrastructural development (Omini, 2019). It is clear that the reason for the massive movement from rural areas to urban centres by young people is to seek for white collar jobs which are limited in numbers. A situation whereby these young people cannot secure jobs in urban centres, they result to social vices such as prostitution, cultism, armed robbery and kidnapping among others. Prostitution is common among young women which make them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other deadly sexually transmitted diseases. Women also participate in cultism and robbery; these social vices are clog in the wheel of progress in any country as investors cannot invest in an environment where there is security risk. Lack of vocational skills is considered a bane to the economy of many African countries particularly Nigeria (Danjma et al, 2011). When the people have vocational skills they would be self-employed and create jobs that can lead to employment of others and subsequently contribute to economic development. Garba (2016), viewed that, in many African countries, women lack the capacity to make meaningful contributions towards achieving sustainable peace mostly in formal processes because of the patriarchal culture that promotes male domination and female subordination. For instance, Oladotun (2020), found out that, the female population in Gambia has the highest illiteracy rate because they are usually denied access to education due to poverty, early marriages and the patriarchal nature of the society that expects a woman to remain perpetually under the control of her father as a child and later, her husband as a wife. This is the case in most African countries. This trend just needs to change in order to give women voice to speak and be part of the intricacies towards the building of the society.

Klot (2007) opines that, from management skills to social amenities and technical capability to resources, capacity building lacking within women's population. Though at this juncture, the government of Nigeria alone cannot sponsor the jobless women in rural areas in skill acquisition because of the huge financial involvement and other commitments. Government resources are lean and there are other sector calling for urgent attention. This is the more reason why Non-Governmental Organisation, charity organisations and feminists' groups advancing for money empowerment need to compliment the effort of the government on skill acquisition among rural women. Skills acquisition is part of technical education, therefore if women in rural areas are empowered with the necessary skills, they will be educated and further give them the needed exposure to be part of societal development. In Nigeria, technical secondary schools and polytechnics were established for the acquisition of skills in order for the graduates of schools to be self-reliant. Apart from women in the rural areas having access to technical education, skill acquisition will help in poverty reduction.

Empowering the women in rural areas would encourage feminization of wealth and boost feminism and human capital development among rural women.

Literature Review

This paper is solely on feminization of skills acquisition and human capital development among rural women in Nigeria. Women actually need to be empowered through skill acquisition in order to be part of development, not only in remote places but in urban towns. According to Nwagwugwu and Agumagu (2007), informed that socio-economic status of both rural and urban families could be enhanced through the empowerment of the womenfolk whose activities spread across almost every sector of the country. Human capital development among women in rural areas will add value to Nigeria's development. For Obisi and Anyim (2012), human capital are the talents, skills, competence and other advantages which people possess and can be put to better

use to give organizations and nations more benefits. While Law and Smullen (2008), see human capital as skills, general or specific, acquired by individuals in the cause of vocational and technical education training and the industrial work place after training. Ayendele (2020) is of the view that human capital is the productive capital of the people in an enterprise or a nation economic agent. Human involve the knowledge or skills that is acquired in order to develop self and contribute to development. Governments all over the globe have been routing for human capital development in order to empower their people and become assets to the national economy.

The literature of human capital is quite vast. Enyekit et al (2011), State that human capital development is a process of increasing human knowledge, the enhancement of skills in vocational and technical education for high level productivity and trigger resourcefulness of trainees. Enyekit et al (2011) mentioned that human capital development presupposes investment, activities and process that produce vocational and technical education knowledge, skills, health or values that are embodied in people in this Covid-19 era where jobs are being lost occasioned by the global pandemic, if rural women are trained on skills acquisition, they can be empowered and contribute to the development of the rural economy. Without a well nurtured harness and develop human capital, entrepreneurship abilities and successes would not develop and grow and Ebonyi State in Nigeria would continue to lag behind in economic growth (Obisi and Anyim, 2012).

Human capital development involve training and capacity building this will help to strengthened women and make them more expose to the happenings within and outside their environment. Human capital development is very important considering the high rate of illiteracy among rural women which is a clog in the development of the rural areas. According to Obisi and Anyim (2012), human capital development is the process of empowering an individual or organisation to effectively achieve set objectives and fulfil a preconceived missing. Human capital development which entails empowerment, it will make women to be financially independent and politically conscious. If the rural women are politically conscious, they would detest vote buying that is responsible for the promotion of bad leadership in the political scheme in Nigeria. Thus, the feminization of skill acquisition and human capital development among rural women in Nigeria is important.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that was adopted for this paper is the human capital theory postulated by Becker in 1962 and further developed in 1976. This theory is a modern extension of Adam Smith's explanation of wage differences the so call disadvantages and advantages between different employments. The financial involvement of acquiring skills and learning are very significant aspect of the net advantage have led economists like Gary Becker and Jacob Miner to claim that, other things being equal, personal income varies according to the amount of investment in human capital which involve education and training understanding by individuals or growth of workers. A wider expectation is the widespread investment in human capital that creates the labour force and the skill base indispensable for economic growth. The survival of the human capital reservoir was said, for examples to explain the rapid reconstruction achieved by the defeated powers of the second world war.

Human capital is a necessity which came to be out of activity able to raise individual workers' productivity. In practice, full-time education is really taken as the principal which tends to develop the human being. For workers' investment in human capital takes both direct cost and cost in forgone earnings. Workers making the investment decisions compare the attractiveness of activities of alternative future income and consumption streams, some of which offer enhanced future income in exchange for higher present training costs and deferred consumption. Returns on societal investment in human capital is always glaring as its links to development.

This paper is tailored towards feminization of skills acquisition and human capital development among women in rural areas in Nigeria. The theory which is human capital is based on the development of the individuals in this platform, it is skill acquisition for rural women.

Rural women are termed to be poor, backward and illiterates, majority of them engage in subsistence farming which they barely have products for sale. In this platform of skills acquisition if the rural women are given the opportunity to learn mechanic, bricklaying, mechanized farming, soap making, automobile engineering, production paint, making of iron doors, welding and carpentry. These are skills that are male dominated and lucrative, thus, if the government, non-governmental organizations and feminist advocates give women the opportunity to learn these skills they would be financially empowered, educated and exposed and they will contribute to the rural economy by creating jobs for others. The skill acquisition will reduce the burden of women totally depending on their husband for their financial upkeep in the family for those who are married and make single women to be looking up to becoming self-reliant with all alacrity.

Skill acquisition and human capital development among women in rural areas would make women to take their rightful place in the society other than being confined to the kitchen and given birth. Women have more to contribute to the development of the society if given the opportunity in Nigeria, few women whom through hard work shot their ways to the public domain have not disappointed. For instance, Professor Dora Akunyili made her mark and ensured the eradication of fake drugs in Nigeria during her days as Director General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), Aisha Yusuf has been an activist fighting for good governance and human right. Presently, Professor Ngozi Iwela, former Nigeria Minister of Finance and Foreign Affairs is gunning for the apex job in World Trade Organization. She had made attempt to head the World Bank. At the global level Women such as Margret Thatcher, Sir Leaf Johnson and Angela Merkel have done well in politics. These are women who are properly educated and given the opportunity to excel. If these rural women are given the opportunity to learn skills and further develop themselves, they can get to the zenith of their profession.

Consequences of Neglecting Rural Women in Human Capital Development

There are grave consequences in neglecting rural women in terms of human capital development. According to Mandy and Jawad (2018) posit that, marginalization of women in economic development and in social and political space is a worldwide phenomenon, however, it is worse in developing Countries. In Nigeria, rural women have been neglected in terms of skills acquisition and human capital development and this have negatively affected rural areas in the participation in the scheme of things.

The following are the consequences of neglecting rural women in Human capital development:

- 1. TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS:** Women and girls in Africa are usually trafficked for the purposes of sexual and economic exploitation particularly prostitution and pornography, forced labour, including working in Commercial Agricultural Plantation and domestic work. Also there are trafficked for arranged marriages or be sold as brides (European Institute for gender equality, 2020). Trafficking of rural women for prostitution to Europe is a social problem in Nigeria. That is the effect of not empowering the rural women to be self-reliant and probably be part of the development of the local economy. When women and growing girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, the result are contracting HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies and premature death. When the death rate of women is high, the productive capacity of women will be low and this is capable of deepening poverty and a crash in rural economy.
- 2. EARLY MARRIAGES:** This is another consequence of not empowering women with skills and human capital development according to Hossan, et al (2013) who conducted a research on factors responsible for early and forced marriage in Iran, discovered that cultural traditional issues driven by poverty and low awareness of the respondents are responsible for early marriage. Parents who are poor without sustainable means of livelihood are prone to giving out their children of school age for early marriage just to wave away the financial responsibility of sponsoring them. Young girls are normally physiologically and emotionally unprepared for marriage. If women are granted skill acquisition and human capital

development, they can support their husbands financially and put an end to sending their female children for early marriage.

3. **UNPREPARED PREGNANCY:** When young women are not trained in acquisition of skills, they are exposed to unprepared pregnancies that can cause high mortality among them. Women with pregnancy need adequate care from medical personnel, when young women are pregnant they will equally lack the financial muscle to regularly visit clinics for medical advice during pregnancy and delivery. If young women acquire skills they would get married and pregnant when they are psychologically, physiologically, emotionally and financially ready and this would help prolong their lives.
4. **SUCCEPTIBILITY TO RAPE:** Young women in rural areas in Nigeria are prone to rape mostly when they are jobless and subjected to hawking in the streets. When women are raped, they are bound to contract HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Apart from rape, they can be used for money rituals by ritualists. There are reported cases of missing persons in Nigeria without trace. Vulnerability to rape affects the productivity level of women in contributing to societal development.
5. **POVERTY:** One of the causes of poverty is lack of skills. When young women in rural areas are given the opportunity to acquire skills, they would be engaged with skills they have learnt and probably employ others. It has been widely reported that mothers give out their young daughters as housemaids to wealthy people in urban centres. This housemaids issue has consistently turned out to be negative, often times the housemaids are maltreated and abused leading to death. Poverty can trigger people to cause unrest and other criminal tendencies, thereby causing instability in the society and scaring investors from investing. Women are involved in high profile crime in Nigeria. A woman who has skills will not be given to crime.
6. **PROSTITUTION:** Young women are prone to prostitution when they lack the require skills to engage themselves. It has been reported in both electronics and print media where Nigerian young women are in Europe and other African countries as commercial sex workers. This is dampening the image of Nigeria in foreign media and probably negatively affecting Nigerians who wish to travel to Europe for legitimate businesses. Most times, Nigerians are turned back at various embassies while trying to process visa application. It affects the economy of Nigeria. Young women in rural areas should not be allowed to waste and become useless without contributing to the development of rural areas.

Benefits of Skill Acquisition Among Rural Women in Nigeria

There are many benefits in the acquisition of skills among rural women. Rural women live in remote areas and are often neglected when it comes to women empowerment. Predominantly they are subsistent farmers, if they are given the opportunity to acquire skills they would have additional income to care for their families. build the local economy and trigger economic growth.

Therefore, the following are the benefits of skill acquisition among rural women:

1. **SELF EMPLOYMENT:** Self-employment is when an individual established a business or practising the skills learnt without any engagement from the government. For a person to be self-employed he must have skills. At present, the rate of unemployment in Nigeria is high, thus skills acquisition is a necessity, mostly among rural women. If rural women are self-employed by the skills they acquired, they will stop prostitution, women trafficking, avoid rape situation and unprepared pregnancy among others.
2. **GOOD PARENTING:** When a female child has a sense of belonging in the respect of financially fending for herself, she will grow up to be a good mother and they give her children good up bringing that can positively influence the society. Mothers can fend for them children when they are engaged with skills.
3. **CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY:** The local economy involve money, when rural women earn money from their skills or services rendered, they will spend the money in the area with corresponding boost of the economy. When money is spent in small

scale businesses, it would lead to economic expansion and employment opportunities. By this, young women would be encouraged to remain in rural areas and develop the areas. Rural area is strategically important to the development of Nigeria.

4. **GOOD EDUCATION:** In the course of acquiring skills people are given Formal and Informal Education. By so doing, they are properly exposed to education that is an added advantage to them. With good education, women can participate in governance, public policy that affects them and pressurize the government on what on what will benefit them using government resources. A society where illiteracy is order of the day, underdevelopment and backwardness are always noticed. Thus, such people have access to the Government in terms of participation in governance and decision making. Rural women with good education can accelerate massive development at the rural level.
5. **AVOID ABUSE LIKE RAPE AND HAWKING:** Rape is presently a social problem in Nigeria, almost on daily basis rape cases are reported across the country. A woman who is jobless is vulnerable to rape and all forms of abuse. Therefore, skill acquisition is economically important for rural women. If the women are engaged with their skills, they would not be vulnerable to rape, rather they will be empowered to concentrate on their livelihood and build a better and commendable society.
6. **CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES:** Skills acquisition is creating jobs for people in an era where unemployment is on the rise. Skill acquisition among rural women will help to reduce unemployment. If the skills this rural woman acquire and have made much money, they can easily employ and train others. The present era, there is a clear shift from acquiring certificate only without any skill. The global economy recognised skills acquisition as it is a measure to human capital development. There are courses in the universities that have become irrelevant considering the fact that skills are taking the centre stage of the global economy. If rural women are given the opportunity to acquire skill, they can contribute to the rural, rational and global economies.

Skills that can be Acquired by Rural Women

Feminization of poverty in rural areas among women is high, that is why skills acquisition for these rural women should be under the sponsorship of the government at all levels, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Philanthropic Organizations and Feminist Advocacy Organizations. These skills would give rural women the voice to speak out and contribute positively to social advancement and promote feminization of wealth.

The skills that can be acquired are as follows: -

- a) Welding and Fabrication Technology
- b) Masonry Work
- c) Carpentry/Modern Roofing/Upholstery/Furniture Work
- d) Electrical(Auto), Conduit Wiring/Surface Work/Installation
- e) Refrigerators/Air- Condition Repairs / Installation
- f) Scrapping/Painting
- g) Aluminium Glazing
- h) Phone repairs
- i) Computer(ICT) Literacy/ Repairs
- j) Plumbing/ Tiling Works
- k) Fashion Design /Tailoring
- l) Vulcanizing

Though these skills are male dominated in Nigeria and are active in the real sector of the economy. Their contributions to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are visible in the economic development of Nigeria.

Contributions of Some Nigerian Women to Nigeria's Development

There are Nigerian women who have contributed immensely to the development of Nigeria from the pre-colonial to post-colonial era and the present day Nigeria in various facets of life. They have played key roles in politics, education, agriculture, commerce etc. Some are dead, others are alive. Few of them would be highlighted and their achievements stated. This is a reflection that if rural women are given opportunity to excel they will utilize it and contribute to development. Mostly now that the country is in serious need of development.

The first woman in this aspect is Margret Ekpo from the ancient town of Calabar, Cross River State, though she is not alive, but her memory is still evergreen in the polity of Nigeria. In fact, the Calabar International Airport was named after her. She led the Aba Women Riot of 1929, when women were asked by the then Colonial Government to pay tax. The protest was successful and women in Nigeria are exempted from the tax payment.

Professor Grace Alele Williams was a former Vice Counsellor of University of Benin and the first female Vice Chancellor in Nigeria. It is on record that her days in the University of Benin, she achieved much in the area of infrastructural development, academic excellence, high moral principle and discipline among students. Professor Dora Akunyile was another amazon that contributed so much in the development of Nigeria, prior to her appointment as director, National Agency on Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the organization was in a comatose state and could not meet up with the mandate of curtailing the manufacturing and spread of fake drugs and harmful food consumption. When Dora Akunyile came on board, the agency was completely sanitized and confronted people who produced fake and adulterated drugs. At a point because of her uncompromising posture, an assassination attempt was made on her life, she narrowly escaped death. Though she has passed on to the great beyond her legacy in the organization is indelible.

Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala is another woman whose mark is in the development of Nigeria and the global Community is glaringly visible. She was the former minister for finance under former President Olusegun Obasanjo and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. During her reign as the Minister of Finance, she was able to clear Nigeria's foreign and local debt, ensured the productivity of the civil service. She has also held several positions in World Bank and other international organizations. At present, she is gunning for the top notch job in World Trade Organization (WTO). Another woman with great passion for her country is Aisha Yusuf. She is an activist that has put the Nigerian government on toes to do the needful. Since the return of democracy in 1999, she has been at the front burner advocating for good governance, respect for human rights and has several confrontations with the Nigerian security agencies. Aisha is fearless and ready to die for what would be beneficial to Nigerians.

These are the few women mentioned, there are others not mentioned here. The few that are mentioned are educated and have contributed greatly in the development of Nigeria. It is an indication that if rural women in Nigeria acquired the requisite skills, they can be a voice in the development of Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper is primarily based on feminization of skill acquisition and human capital development among rural women in Nigeria. The article has displayed the neglect of rural women in Nigeria by the government and are living in an unplanned environment, thereby relegating them to the background. Despite their disadvantaged position owing to environment, they have much to show if the opportunity of skill acquisition is given to them. They can do well in mechanized farming, automobile engineering, soap making, paint making, plumbing, bricklaying, tiles making etc.

Recommendations

Nigeria is presently being bedevilled with economic recession and massive unemployment, thus, the need for massive development in all levels cannot be overemphasize. The people who understand how the rural areas should be developed are the people residing there. Therefore, rural

women should henceforth be given adequate consideration for skills acquisition programs. Governments at all levels, charity organizations, on-governmental organization and individuals should give rural women special consideration in the sponsorship of skills acquisition programs.

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