

GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Gender equity occurs when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. This paper provided an overview of the concept of gender, gender equity, education, and global sustainability. It also examined gender issues in education and strategic ways to achieve gender equity in education for global sustainability. A meta-analysis approach was used from text materials, journals, among others for information on this paper. Findings from the review indicated gender gap in education as attributed to curriculum textbooks and approach in instructions. Also, gender issues in education were attributes to instructional materials, content of instruction, cultural values and beliefs, the paper suggested the way forward as mounting campaign on cultural change, gender responsive teaching and learning, inclusive education policies and practices, socio economic factor, and investing in teacher training skills. The contents, learning experiences, evaluation procedures, instructional materials and even the language of instruction could be gender stereotyped and misleading.

Keywords: Gender equity, education, global sustainability

Introduction

Gender equity refers to giving girls and boys, as well as women and men, the same opportunities, rights, and obligations. Gender is seen as a sociocultural expression of characteristics and roles that are related to certain groups of individuals with reference to their sex and sexuality traits (Jhpiego, 2020). Gender traits and academic engagement are assumed to have the same relationship when taught with different strategies according to Lundberg (2020). Also, McGeown and Warhurst (2019) confirmed that, gender identity or traits offer an innovative method to the study of sexual differences, within studies that may lead to a serious understanding of sexual differences in education. Education which is a gradual acquisition of information, facts, attitudes and skills that individuals absorb as they grow up through a process is determined by gender disposition of individuals. The essential value of education and its potentials in global sustainability has informed the Nigerian government through its education system to engage a series of educational policies and gender initiatives to show commitment towards development goals such as Universal Basic Education (UBE). Therefore, there is a need for gender relations awareness between men and women, and the key roles it plays in achieving global sustainability. Hence, beneficiaries of education or the opportunities it provides should not be decided by a person's sex, economic status, or social background, but rather by their skills, talents, and diligence.

Conceptualization

Gender is regarded as a social and biological construct which determines being a male or a female. Many researchers have seen gender as a social makeup that helps to distinguish and explain the biological characteristics and social roles a society assigns to either male or female (Nwofia & Emezi, 2014; UNESCO, 2022; Ogwu, Kanu & Adeniji,

2023); cultural determinant and behavioural patterns of males and females towards role assignment that affect learners' academic activities (Ogwu & Azor, 2015; Offorma, 2016; Nnamani & Oyibe, 2016, Akutaekwe & Ohabuiro, 2020). It involves societal standards and expectations that are widely accepted regarding the roles, traits, and acceptable behaviour for men and women. The society determines the different roles to assign to men and women, not their biological features. Gender is acquired from an early age through socialization in places like family, school etc. It can be challenging to define precisely what is meant by the word "gender" and how it differs from the similar word "sex.". These expectations and attributes of gender vary from society to society and could be changed over time depending on culture. All these concepts differ in their various dispositions of either being a male or female which brings in the case of equity.

Gender equity refers to the outcome of equal power and rights for men and women in accordance with the human rights agenda. In gender equity, responsibilities and benefits are fairly distributed between women and men, also their needs, wants, and priorities must be considered. Equity means fairness, inclusiveness, non-discrimination, non-stereotyping, non-bias, no sexism, no subordination, no depersonalization, and a friendly level playing field for everyone (Iwuji, 2017). Therefore, gender equity arises when people, regardless of gender, may engage completely and actively in societal activities and equally share in the resulting costs. According to UNICEF (2022) gender equity "means that women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. Equal treatment for men and women does not imply that they are the same, but rather that they have equal worth. This indicates that, he needs, wants and priorities of women and men are taken into account. Gender equity makes sure that men and women have the same status, the same opportunity to exercise their human rights, and the same chance to reach their full potential in order to contribute to political, economic, social, and cultural progress and to benefit from the outcomes. When resources, opportunities, and support are made available to men and women equally, regardless of their biological sex, gender equity can be fostered. Equal representation of men and women is measurable in gender equality. Everyone must take responsibility for it as it is not a woman's problem.

The idea of gender equity is based on the presumption that there shouldn't be any unfairness in how men and women are assigned opportunities, resources, and obligations. UNICEF (2018) defines gender equity to mean that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, and protections. Gender equity seeks to compare opportunities and treatment available to both men and women in various ways. Gender equity generates many issues relating to women having equal opportunities in education as their male counterparts, gap between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment. Although, there has been considerable advancement of gender equity in health, labour and governance to mention but a few, however, there still exists a glaring fact that inequality continues to deepen in our education system due to cultural ideologies and practices.

Education can be said to be a process of developing individuals in a given society to acquire appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and competencies in order to live a meaningful life and contribute towards the growth and progress of the society. According to Offorma, Ikonta and Ogunleye (2019), education is a process by which an individual is empowered to acquire some knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to become functional member of his/her society. Education helps individuals to develop their attitudes, abilities, skills and other positive behaviors which add value to the society where

they live. Opri (2016) defined education as a process of imparting knowledge through instructions or other practical procedures that lead to positive changes in human life and behavior. Education encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, skills, value, beliefs, and habits. Education is simply life and life is education.

The major purpose of education is to advance human development in the areas of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and psycho productive domains. Through education, people acquire general knowledge, develop the powers of reasoning and judgment, and generally prepare oneself or others intellectually for mature life. It is also viewed as a process in which human beings, knowledge, characters, and behavior are shaped and molded, leading to mankind's enlightenment (Lewis, 2017). Education therefore, is a systematic process whereby individuals are exposed to skills, values, knowledge, norms, and behaviours to enable them function well in the society where they exist. Education therefore, is an important process in human development needed by every country for advancement. Education is one of the best investments the world can make to increase the human capital needed for global sustainability which significantly improves health, nutrition, and life expectancy.

The word "global" refers to the entire world worldwide. It relates to a whole universe. While Sustainability is the ability to satisfy our own demands without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. This implies that sustainability is a process that creates a vibrant economy and high quality life while representing the need to sustain natural resources and protect the environment for our use and for the coming generation. It advocates that future generations should live in a pleasurable and undiminished world. Most conceptions of sustainability include considerations for social equality and economic development. The idea of sustainability has greatly affected global efforts to create governance frameworks that can address new global concerns like gender equality or quality education.

The term "global sustainability" describes how well our planet can support the present and future well-being of all its inhabitants. It refers to the situation in which society and the biosphere, the world and the earth, and people and nature can coexist in ways that promote positive harmony, stability, and resilience to support current and future generations (Daniel, 2023). Sustainability is seen as both a new agenda and a novel set of principles for inclusive governance (Adekoya, 2021). Global sustainability involves learning about the history and present reality of global issues, challenging existing practice and collaborating with others to seek innovative, effective and inclusive solutions. It is a vision for the future of a socially and environmentally just world where all people have access to quality education, good health and decent work. It seeks to challenge the status quo, change perceptions and encourage innovation, empower communities, foster knowledge and protect the natural world. To accomplish this vision, is to create a world with no poverty, no hunger, equal right, where everyone has access to education, and good health. In order to achieve global sustainability, we need to promote sustainable development practices at local, national, and global levels, while also fostering collaboration and partnerships across sectors and stakeholders. Ultimately, global sustainability is about creating a world that is livable, equitable, and prosperous for all, now and in the future which is embedded in the seventeen sustainable development goals. Achieving this goal requires a shared commitment from individuals, businesses, governments, and civil society to work together towards a more sustainable and resilient future especially in achieving equity and inclusiveness in educational matters.

Gender Issues in Educational Settings

Education has the ability to promote gender equality, which is essential for building a world that is more tranquil, prosperous, healthy, and sustainable. But for education to achieve its full potential, all children, regardless of gender, must share in its benefits. For this reason, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) prioritizes gender equality in all of its activities. This could be reflected in the general access to education, curriculum content, material resources utilization, classroom management setting, as well as other issues that are prevalent in the cultural and religious beliefs practices in educational settings.

The issue of access to education seems to be predominantly common among girls than boys in northern Nigeria while the reverse is the case in South Eastern Nigeria. In some regions, boys' educational opportunities are limited by gender roles that force them to work rather than attend school. However, girls are most often the victims of gender discrimination especially in the Northern part of Nigeria where some of them are restricted from going to school. According to UNICEF (2017) 60% of Nigeria's out-of-school children come from the North, where enrollment rates for girls have dramatically decreased as a result of early marriages, lack of value placed on education, and ongoing security issues.

Gender in curriculum content shows how males or females are stereotypically tilted to a particular subject in the curriculum. The origin of content selection in the school curriculum has been the genesis to gender discrimination in Nigeria educational system. The girl child according to Ogwu, Ukwu and Ukweze (2020) has been tailored to selecting certain subjects in the school curriculum such as home economics, and English language which has led to gender stereotyping in some of these subjects with females featuring more than males. In History curriculum, males were also found to enroll into this subject than females (Ogwu & Azor, 2019). Another scenario of negative gender construction is that science subjects like, chemistry, mathematics, and physics are ascribed to boys, while arts subjects like social studies, home economics and literature in English are ascribed to girls. For instance in a law firm, the pictures used for an illustration may portray a man as a lawyer and a woman as a clerk or a receptionist. Curriculum and teaching techniques can express ideas and practices that depict gender bias (Akpakwu & Bua, 2014). For instance, if teachers assume that boys learn faster than girls and show it in their actions, it will not only boost the confidence of a particular gender and their participation in class but also weaken their ego and self-efficacy. According to gender stratification research, discrimination against women in work and education has a negative impact on economic development and is also disastrous from humanitarian standpoint (Daniel et al., 2017). Some activities in the school are at times organized by teachers with a preference of a particular gender such as: storytelling, drawing, dramatization, and role playing that are always directed towards girls (Muasya & Kazungu, 2018). This implies that the teacher could be stereotypically tilted to a particular gender which could mar effective curriculum delivery.

Gender difference in terms of learning material utilization is one of the educational issues that projects inequality in learning. This is reflected in textbooks, charts, posters, models, pictures, etc. used in teaching and learning. The differences in gender are greatly encouraged by the transformation and socialization roles played by the school. There is

gender bias in textbook where different specific roles are assigned to men and women. The authors of textbooks usually create a world that learners can recognize and identify learning in different subjects. The human race is inhabited by men, women, boys and girls; therefore, the authors of textbooks and curriculum-designs present a gendered picture of the world and encourage boys and girls to take up the stereotypical positions constructed for them in these books and learning materials (Duru, 2017). The constructions by these authors are driven by social experiences which affects students' self-image. These learning materials are not gender sensitive. They do not depict realistic illustration of life where women and men share the same responsibilities. Apart from instructional materials, the structure in the classroom management also determines the difference.

In the classroom management structure there is prejudice against girls sitting next to the boy child as a result of cultural or religious beliefs. This classroom arrangement influences boys and girls sitting positions in separate rows. The boys are more likely to be physically active and aggressive during play than the girls, who are socialized to a more feminine ideal. While the boys are encouraged to be active, the girls are complimented for their poise, neatness, and quietness. Boys' and girls' behaviors at school reflect the various socialization styles they experienced growing up. Schools, in the meantime, accept and validate beliefs about "boys nature" (masculine identity) and "girls nature" (feminine identity), "positioning" boys and girls in various social contexts. However, the acceptance of male indiscipline as "boy nature" and "good behavior" as "girl nature" has been to blame for unequal education (Amruthraj, 2023).

Cultural beliefs and societal practices contribute to gender disparity in gender as well. Cultural beliefs that girls are better at home activities such as sewing and cooking is culturally and globally attached (UNESCO, 2015). This ideology is what usually tailors the girl child to select Home Economic as a subject in the school curriculum (Ogwu, Ukwu & Ukwueze, 2020). This societal structure play major roles on how children are raised and how they differentiate between the powers given to men versus those allocated to women (Amruthraj, 2023). There is a cultural belief that male children are more valued than female children, so when families cannot afford to send all of their children to school, they prioritize training their male offspring. Parents prefer to give their girl-child out in marriage early and use the bride price to train their male child. Also, there are cultural ideologies that advanced education for women makes them proud and less likely to humble themselves to perform their traditional roles as mothers and wives. The culturists suggest that gender inequality in education is as a result of cultural norms and practices (Pittin, 1990) in (Daniel, Comfort & Afusat, 2017). However, gender inequality could be remedied using many intervention strategies in order to have sustainable live.

Strategies for Achieving Gender Equity in Education for Global Sustainability

Gender equality is the foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. According to Dhar (2018), to achieve gender equity is a matter of human rights and is crucial to progress across all the goals and targets. Achieving gender equality is defined as having "equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys, and equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to society (GPE, 2018). This implies that achieving gender equality is at the heart of human rights agenda, and the requisite for achieving the transformational 2030 Agenda for global sustainability. In order to advance gender equality in education, African nations must engage in programs and policy changes. Some of the programs should be geared towards implementing cultural changes. Manlosa and Matias (2018) believed that much progress can still be made in

actualizing equity in educational access and other social rights for women through supportive government policies that are gender-sensitive.

The cultural agents of change such as families, religious leaders, traditional leaders, community leaders and the youths who are the most important agents of change should be responsible for implementing sustainable changes. Cultural and economic barriers that hinder girls from attending school should be discussed with families and communities. Education opportunities should be provided for all in order to help stimulate productivity and also reduce the economic vulnerability of poor households. Education fosters political and social engagement. Girls who receive education are more likely to engage in political and social activities as well as be knowledgeable and engaged citizens. Another strategy of achieving gender equity in education for global sustainability includes gender responsive teaching and learning.

Gender-responsive teaching and learning is a process that involves using inclusive teaching methods and learning materials that meets the needs of all students, including boys and girls. This includes using gender sensitive-language and pictures, providing a level playing ground for girls and boys to succeed, and also educating students on gender equity and healthy relationships. Also, inclusive education has to be taken very seriously. Inclusive education policies and practices involves creating enabling environment where all students feel valued and respected, irrespective of their gender, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background (Nwoke, 2020). Students with disabilities have to be accommodated, and inclusive environment provided for. Besides, socio-economic factors such as poverty, rural settlement, and lack of infrastructure can hinder both girls and boys from accessing education. To address this issue, government should provide scholarships, build schools in rural and remote areas, provide safe transportation for boys and girls.

Government has to invest in teacher training to equip teachers with the skills, knowledge and resources needed to provide a quality education for all students, irrespective of gender. Appropriate training and resources also have to be provided for the teachers so as to equip them to recognize and address gender-based violence in the school premises and provide support for affected students. There is an African Proverb that says "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Girls' education makes their nations stronger and more successful.

The world's poorest nations for gender equality are those that have persistently failed to give women the same chances as men. According to Bolaji, Jalloh, Imonitie, and Walon-Jalloh (2018), internal squabbles within policy implementation institutions and the bottleneck in bureaucracy is a significant obstacle to the realization of universal access to education in African nations, particularly Nigeria. Given the aforementioned, the position of Bolaji et al, (2018), that the realization of education for all in 2050, depends heavily on the understanding of the African bureaucrats that collective will or responsibility is the only way to actualized policy initiatives then, is that for Nigeria and other West African countries to overcome this menace and put the continent on the track of educational success devoid of gender disparities and discriminations, geared towards sustainable future. This corroborates in some ways with Manlosa and Matias (2018) that gender equity can only be reflected in the difference made in women's lives, particularly in the labour context. It involves a substantive shift not in the proportion of men and women under a specific indicator but in the deeper dimensions of societal norms and scene of identities to be valued and respected equally, regardless of gender. They suggest that if equity is to be

realized on gender, then efforts must be advanced beyond statistical analysis to determine gender parity. The suggestions include:

1. efforts should be made by relevant stakeholders in the education industry to assist the teacher to acquire necessary skills and knowledge that will help in the implementation of a gender-responsive curriculum by sponsoring teachers to attend workshops, seminars and conferences on gender;
2. efforts should also be made by teachers to avoid creating a learning environment that is sexist or gender insensitive by giving equal attention to both males and females in terms of their specific learning needs;
3. curriculum planners/developers must ensure that the curriculum is flexible and dynamic in reflecting global calls for gender-responsive curriculum at all levels;
4. textbook writers should not be gender biased in using pronouns and other pictorial representations for portraying a specific gender in a learning environment; and
5. proactive measures need to be put in place by Ministry of Education right from the curriculum planning process through every process of the curriculum development and implementation phase to neutralize every form of gender stereotyping.

Conclusion

It is impossible to separate gender equity from education because it is crucial to the process of teaching and learning. Gender equality affects almost every aspect of public life. Gender equality benefits girls, boys, women and men, therefore everyone should be concerned about it. To ensure that no one is left behind, achieving gender equity in education demands a system-wide institutional shift in how policies and strategies are created. These strategies include cultural changes, gender-responsive teaching and learning, inclusive education policies and practices, socio-economic factors, investing in teacher training. In order to achieve global sustainability, there is need for the integration of the potentials and capabilities of men, women, boys and girls. No gender should be underestimated.

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