

WOMEN EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT AND SUSTAINABLE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA: AKWA IBOM STATE IN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined women educational empowerment and the sustainable political development of Nigeria. The population consisted of female lecturers from three higher educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State. These include the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden; and Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afana Nsit. The cluster sampling technique was used in selecting a sample of 235 respondents out of a population of 2,351 targeted respondents. Two null hypotheses were formulated, based on the specific objectives of the study and tested at the .05 alpha level using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured instrument, “Women Empowerment and Sustainable Political Development Questionnaire” (WESPDQ), which was duly validated by experts. The WESPDQ was tested for reliability using the Cronbach alpha approach, with a coefficient of .78 indicating that the instrument was internally consistent. Findings indicated a significant relationship between the two independent variables and the dependent variable respectively. It was, therefore, concluded that women educational empowerment has a significant relationship with the sustainable political development of Nigeria. It was recommended, among other things, that government at all levels (federal, state and local) should formulate policies that seek to empower women educationally to facilitate sustainable political development of the country.*

KEYWORD: Empowerment, gender, politics, sustainable, women, women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the notion of sustainable development has become a key concern for educational actors. It is the tradition of upholding processes of productivity continuously through the rational use of resources to achieve objectives; it deals with the ability to attract, satisfy and retain students, staff as well as make available relevant material resources that are capable of keeping an educational system on (Owan & Offu, 2021). One of the issues on women as an integral part of a nation's population was women participation in politics and government. In Nigeria, according to the 2006 census, women account for over 50% of the population, but they are underrepresented in politics and government relative to their population (Chinwokwu & Arop 2018). Taking into consideration, the Beijing Conference held in 1995 recommended that women should be given 30% of the appointive position of leadership at all respective levels of leadership. It was also said in the conference that 10% of every annual budget should be devoted to women empowerment programmes (Chinwokwu & Arop 2018). However, these recommendations cannot be meaningfully implemented until certain constraints are decisively dealt with. One of such constraints is the low educational status of Nigerian women.

Education is an important tool for promoting gender equality and the advancement of women folk in the socioeconomic and political development of any nation. Inequality in education is, therefore, an impediment to women's active participation in the leadership and political development of the nation. The empowerment of women for participation in politics and government is deeply linked to education. The majority of women are derailed politically, not because they do not have political potential but because of education (Aghamelu, 2020). It is widely believed that education is an important tool for the achievement of social justice and equity (Omorobi et al., 2020; Owan et al., 2018). It is inevitable if women are to be empowered to participate actively in the socio-political and economic development of the nation.

Women are known to be at the centre of activities in the family, society and many other aspects of community life. As such, their contributions in household chores, income-earning activities, community participation and so on, cannot be underestimated. As observed by Aina (2004), women's access to power has been limited because of their low level of education as a result of the disparity in the pattern of female enrolment in various faculties in universities and colleges. Similarly, Ajay et al. (2006) opined that the ratio of men to women on enrolment confirms the fact that lukewarm attitude towards female's education is a common phenomenon. Again, females are greatly underrepresented in senior positions in education as in many other occupations (Archibong et al., 2018; Bush, 2006; Wilson, 2017). Bush further stated that men dominate numerically in senior positions in all phases of education except for nursery and infant schools.

Access to higher education by women is vital to their attainment of higher status, necessary for leadership positions and political participation. Because of the unique position of women in the family, an educated mother tends to have a greater impact on family life than an educated man. Over the years, it has been discovered that both male and female students have the potentials to be great and to contribute meaningfully to nation-building, but the girl child is disadvantaged as a result of limitations. In Nigeria, as in many developing countries, there is a gender gap in terms of access to education for a long time. Most Nigerian females live in rural areas and they are either semi-illiterates or non-literate (Aboyade, 1987; Aghamelu, 2020). The study of Adegbesan (2007) revealed that 33.7% of females had no form of education in the North-Eastern states of Nigeria (Borno, Yola, Adamawa and Bauchi). In the North-Western States (Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto and Jigawa, etc) 87.8% of female had no formal education. The case of southern states was slightly better.

In the South East (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Imo, Cross-River, Anambra) only 36.2% of female have no formal education. In the South West (Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti) at least 26.1% of females had no formal education. The Middle Belt states (Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Kwara, Niger, Kogi) are in between the South and North in terms of average figures of female illiteracy (Adelabu & Adepoju, 2007; UNICEF, 2002). Though Nigerian women are known to be very active in food production and domestic duties, in the areas of politics and government, the picture is less cheering. For instance, during the Second Republic (1970-1983) women formed only 0.7% of the Federal Legislature. Also, in 1995, out of 369 delegated to the constitutional Conference only 8 (eight) were women (Suara, 1996).

Although Nigerian women have the electoral capacity to acquire power and thereby effect political change by their superior electoral strength over men, they are lacking in gender

competitive consciousness, particularly in a system entrenched with patriarchal hegemonic leadership, and with the male political elite unprepared to accede to gender justice. This can be explained by the ratio of male to female among the executives of the country. Out of a total of 11,117 electable positions available during the 1999 elections, only 631 women contested, which is a mere 5.6%, not of the total number of contestants, but the number of positions available for the contest. Of the 631 female contestants, only 180 (143 of whom were elected as ward councillors) managed to win, representing just 1.6% of the electable positions. In other words, of all electable positions available during the 1999 elections, only 1.6% was occupied by women. In 2003, men occupied 105 out of 109 seats leaving 4 for women representing 3.7%. There was an increase in 2007 as women occupied 9 seats out of 109 representing 8.3% (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Country Report, 2008).

Anigwe (2014) indicated that women were still underrepresented in the political sector of government and lacked full political power as they strived for equality to become political leaders. This is the more reason why female youths have been receiving so much attention from agencies like UNDP, United Nations, UNESCO, FAWE and other numerous national and international nongovernmental organizations aimed at reducing gender inequality problems in our society. In addition to the contributions of the various agencies concerned with female education, the higher institutions have a lot of roles to play in the empowering process for higher education. The Role of Higher Education in Female Youth Leadership Empowerment Education is believed to be the most powerful and dynamic instrument for the social, economic, political scientific and technological development of nations. As such, girls must be further exposed to higher education where they can acquire the appropriate education that can develop them to become better citizens and good leader in future.

In 2011, Onah showed that despite the efforts of international organisations through conventions and treaties to create awareness on women rights issues, gender disparity persists in Nigerian society. Implying that education is not the cause of the gender gap in politics. However, the study of Chinwokwu and Arop (2018) challenges that of Onah claiming that if given the same opportunity with men, women have the capacity and competence to compete favourably with men and in most cases have performed creditably better than men under the same platform without prejudice. The study of Chinwokwu and Arop argued that many females have been exposed to formal education hence have what it takes to become a leader but are usually underestimated. Inferences from the study of Sharma (2020) indicated that the participation of women in politics is not only subjected to their education. Sharma reported that sustainability of political development is not only counted by the education of the people but by many other factors including the information or awareness, family support/environment, legal environment, political environment, and personal ambitions or internal motivation. This means that the empowerment of women in all aspect especially their education would promote the sustainability of politics in a country.

However, the findings of Vundi (2020) contradicted that of Sharma (2020) in that, despite the traditional strategies of empowerment adopted by the government and the private sector, women had their preferred strategies to empower themselves and are not move for political affairs. Thus, women educational empowerment plays a little role in the sustainability of politics as the study uncovered that in the rural areas where most of the women are not

educationally grounded, the rate of involvement in informal sectors was very high compared to their male counterparts who are well literally inclined. This implies that their involvement in activities is driven by the factors revealed by Sharma (2020). According to the findings of Memon and Idris (2019), women in rural Sindh are unable to participate in political action or vote in elections. Though there are rare exceptions, women in Sindh face significant challenges in exercising their constitutionally protected right to vote. The study suggested that the state governing entities must solve this issue so that women in Sindh can play their full political role. This can be resolved by educating the women (Memon & Idris, 2019).

From the foregoing, it has been observed that the extent of the gender gap and disparity in the formal education sector has been an issue with no traceable origin. The literature revealed the status of female formal education in the nation. Although studies have been conducted to relate women education/literacy to the problem of gender inequality in political affairs, there is a paucity of empirical studies as a majority of the cited works were conceptually and/or theoretically designed. To address this gap, the design of this present study takes an empirical format intending to assess the relationship between women education empowerment and sustainability of political development in Nigeria. Hence, the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between women educational empowerment and the sustainable socio-political development of Nigeria.

Specifically, the study which was delimited to Akwa Ibom State sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian Politics.
2. Determine the relationship between women educational empowerment and sustainable political development of Nigeria.

Statement of hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed to direct the study.

1. There is no significant relationship between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian Politics.
2. There is no significant relationship between women educational empowerment and the sustainable political development of Nigeria.

METHODS

The correlational research design was adopted for the study. The design was considered appropriate for the study because it measures the relationship between two variables without the control of either of the variable. The population consisted of female lecturers from the three higher educational institutions in Akwa Ibom State: The University of Uyo; Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden; and Akwa Ibom State College of Education, Afaha Nsit. This stood at 2351. The Cluster Sampling Technique was used in selecting a sample of 235 respondents for the study. This represented 10 per cent of the total population. A structured instrument tag "Women Empowerment and Sustainable Political Development Questionnaire (WESPDQ)", was developed and used in collecting data for the study. The instrument was made up of three sections: Women Educational Empowerment, Women Political Participation; and Political Development of Nigeria with five items in each section. It was pre-tested to establish its reliability level which stood at 0.77 using the Cronbach Alpha technique.

RESULT

Hypothesis one

The first hypothesis of this study states that there is no significant relationship between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian Politics. To test this hypothesis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian politics

		Women educational empowerment	Political participation
Women educational empowerment	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1.0	.78 .14
	N		235
Political participation	Political participation Pearson Correlation Sig (2-tailed)	.78 .14	1.0 235
	N	235	235

Critical r-value = .098; calculated r = .78

The result in Table 1 indicated that the calculated r-value of 0.78 was greater than the critical revalue of .098 at the .05 alpha level and 233 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This means that a significant relationship exists between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian politics.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between women educational empowerment and the sustainable political development of Nigeria. To test this hypothesis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis(r) was employed.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between women educational empowerment and political development of Nigeria

		Women educational empowerment	Political development
Women educational empowerment	PearsonCorrelation Sig. (2-tailed)	1.0	.67 .11
	N	235	235
Political development	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.67 .11	1.0 235
	N	235	235

Critical rvalue = .098, calculated r = .67

The result in Table 2 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.67 was greater than the critical r-value of .098 at the .05 alpha level and 233 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was, therefore, rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between women educational empowerment and the sustainability of the political development of Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between women educational empowerment and their participation in Nigerian politics. This finding is not surprising since education creates awareness and enlighten people on the relevance of a particular thing, it is expected that one who is educationally incline would have the awareness, importance, and would be able to detect the relevance of participating in political activities. The study revealed that exposing women to quality education would greatly curb the issue of gender disparity. For instance, a majority of the women are ready to serve if the opportunity is offered to them. For this to be achieved, women education (at all levels) should be empowered. Education is aimed at exposing people; thus, women who are educationally empowered tend to attain a very high level of intellectual development. This will help to understand the importance of engaging in political matters and assume leadership positions, just like their male counterparts.

This finding of this study is similar to that of Chinwokwu and Arop (2018) which revealed that if given the same opportunity with men, women have the capacity and competence to compete favourably with men and in most cases have performed creditably better than men under the same platform without prejudice. Chinwokwu and Arop also found that many females have been exposed to formal education hence have what it takes to become a leader but are usually underestimated. The finding is also in line with that of Aina (2004) which showed that educated women are more active in the political process of the country and that the empowerment of women for participation in political government is deeply linked to education. The majority of women are derailed politically, not because they do not have political potential but because of education. Women, such as Erelu Olusola Obada, Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Prof. Dora Akunyili and Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala took an active part in politics and leadership because of their level of education. Women have the potentials for good leadership, but many of them cannot come to the limelight because of their low level of education.

However, this study contradicts Vundi (2020) who found that, despite the traditional strategies of empowerment adopted by the government and the private sector, women had their preferred strategies to empower themselves and are not move for political affairs. The disparity in the results of the cited study and that of the present research may have been due to variations in the areas of study. The Vundi study was conducted in rural areas where women are not well exposed to leadership. Thus, most of the women in rural areas may have already given up that leadership is meant for men. Especially, when they make references to their husbands being the head of the family.

The second finding of this study indicated a significant relationship between women educational empowerment and the sustainable political development of Nigeria. This result implies that the more women are empowered educationally, the political development of the nation will tilt towards sustainability. Conversely, areas with a low extent of women

empowerment will witness a low extent in the development of political activities. The finding is highly expected because of the complementary or supplementary roles of educated women in adding value to society. In an instance, the nation Nigeria was made proud by a woman (Dr Ngozi Okonjor Iweala) on her appointment as the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation in 2021. This feat was recorded in a nation with many other male Professors of Economics, but she emerged. Recently, the number of women in political offices in Nigeria is increasing with a total of 11 and 13 women in the National assembly (Senate) and the house of representative respectively. An assessment of these women profile indicated that they are all literate and well educated. These short narratives present a case in support of this study's finding that the educational empowerment of women is a significant correlate of national development.

The second finding aligns with the position of Memon and Idris (2019) that women in rural areas are unable to participate in political action or vote in elections. The scholar maintained that although there are rare exceptions, women face significant challenges in exercising their constitutionally protected right to vote. The cited study suggested that the state governing entities must solve this issue so that women can play their full political role. This, they said, can be resolved by educating the women (Memon & Idris, 2019). However, this finding is in contrast with the results of Onah (2011), which showed that despite the efforts of international organisations through conventions and treaties to create awareness on women rights issues, gender disparity persists in Nigerian society. In the same vein, Sharma reported that sustainability of political development is not only counted by the education of the people but by many other factors including the information or awareness, family support/environment, legal environment, political environment, and personal ambitions or internal motivation. This, according to the cited author, means that the empowerment of women in all aspect especially their education may only promote the sustainability of politics in a country if other factors are controlled. The variation in the position between the cited works and the present study's finding may be taken lightly. This is because the cited authors' positions were subjective and baseless; no data were used to support their argument. Furthermore, the factors mentioned as covariates (that could nullify the effect of women education on political development) have not been studied. However, this study puts forth an argument informed by the findings of an empirical study, culminating in a data-driven conclusion.

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to determine the nexus between women educational empowerment and the political sustainability of Nigeria. The research is informed by the gender gaps and under-representation of women in political matters. The study was driven by two specific objectives that were met through the use of a quantitative research methodology. Based on the evidence of this study, it has been concluded that the educational empowerment of women can facilitate their participation in the political processes of the country. Education is the most effective way to enhance Nigeria's women political awareness, boost their readiness and promote effective participation. Therefore, women educational empowerment has a direct relationship with the sustainable political development of Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. Gender bias and all forms of gender discrimination in education should be removed to foster effective women participation in the political process;
2. Teaching and learning facilities should be made gender-friendly to encourage more female participation in the education process;
3. Women should be given free education up to the university level This should cover the cost of books, hostel accommodation, feeding and other learning materials;
4. Programmes for non-formal education should be oriented towards equipping women with basic knowledge and skills to improve on their level of awareness, civil rights and their interest and motivation in political participation;
5. Informal education through planned workshops and seminars should be regularly organised for women to boost their political awareness and participation in the development of the country;
6. The Commission for women affairs should create awareness among women on the importance of active participation in politics through campaigns, talks, rail and radio and television broadcasts.

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