

WOMEN IN CONTINUING EDUCATION TOWARDS LIFELONG LEARNING: A STUDY OF CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, OWERRI (FUTO), IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Literacy is a basic human right, yet so many women are either denied or lack in this great opportunity to a productive livelihood. This is in spite of the important role women play in the achievement of global sustainable development. Education of women brings about the transformation of lives, creates a pathway up and out of a life of poverty and dependence on others. It offers women new perspective for their voices to be heard and the means to become who they desire. Considering the need to be educated irrespective of time, using the platform created by continuing education, a study was designed to determine the who and the intent of women who are engaged in continuing education programme in FUTO. Specifically, the research intends to find out the women who are engaged in the programme, their areas of interest, their reasons of involving themselves in the programme and how it will lead to sustainable development. The researchers used document analysis to collect data. The result of the research would provide insight into why women engage in continuing education as well as areas which women are aspiring to excel in future.

Keywords: Women in continuing education, lifelong learning, sustainable development.

Introduction

Education remains one of the major tools for human and national development. Women in Continuing Education play a vital role in the development of any society. The idea of continuing education for women suggests that a vacuum exists that needs to be filled. Therefore, continuing education for lifelong learning has emerged as one of the keys to improving the quality of the life of women in the 21st century. The contemporary idea of continuing education of women goes beyond what only takes place in the four walls of the classroom. It is no longer satisfactory to have a sound initial education but one must continue to acquire new knowledge and skills to gain from the new opportunities that science and technology offers to humanity, and to cope with the difficulties of life in this era of global change. There is no gainsaying the fact that every investment in education is a worthwhile venture.

Continuing education according to Tahir (2000) means that sub-set of adult education that seeks to positively link the needs and aspirations of individuals with educational activities, for development of

their potential and for the socio-economic and political development of a nation. It is widely recognised as a powerful tool for illiteracy eradication in women, reducing poverty and attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It has been said that "if you educate a woman, you educate a nation". The constant changes in the labour market and in society continuously make new demands on the skills and adaptability of individuals and that is why continuing education for lifelong learning cannot be over emphasised. Participation in education and continuing training help women participate actively in the labour market throughout their lives.

Therefore, women education or literacy simply means the ability of women to read and write which brings about effective contribution by women to the management of various sectors of the society. According to Wanyama (2014) continuing education provides basic education and training opportunities to adults and out of school youth, aged fifteen years and above, who have either missed out on formal education in their childhood or for one reason or the other, dropped out of school before attaining



sustainable levels. Furthermore, providing opportunities to learn throughout life turns out to be a crucial factor in the struggle to eradicate poverty and to educate for sustainable development in which knowledge and skills can be acquired in the information age outside of the formal education system. Nussbaum (2000) made reference to a study in which women in rural Bangladesh received literacy training. While the women were "initially doubtful" about what they could gain from this skill, they found literacy useful in goals they were already pursuing, such as economic security and enhanced status in the family and society at large. Therefore, the importance of women in continuing education for sustainable development of families and nation cannot be over emphasised. Mastaller (2012) said: "Educate a man and he will leave his home to find work. Educate a woman and she will have fewer children, introduce better health practices to her family and village, run her household more efficiently, and most importantly, advocate for the education of her children."

Women in Continuing Education

The education of women has a very long history around the world. Educating women was earlier limited to the informal system of education which is education acquired in the home. The informal method of educating women was the major system of acquiring knowledge which women were exposed to for a very long time.

According to Barry (2013), women education dates back to the 18th century in America where women were taught how to handle household chores. Women education during this period was, therefore, formed towards assisting the girl child become a wife material and manage her home properly after marriage. It was a period of teaching women how to farm and be very hard working in farm work.

Today, the education of women has gone beyond the task of being home managers to that of managing small and large business organisations. Women now acquire formal education in order to assist them to contribute effectively to the management of various sectors of the society. Akinpelu (2002) asserts that continuing education is a post-initial education and observed that the word

"continuing" can only mean a carrying forward or an extension of an activity rather than a starting of it. Osuji (2001) supports this by stating that continuing education is strictly, an adult education concept which stresses the provision of educational opportunities for adults (women) after cessation of formal schooling. He adds that it means education and re-education, training and re-training opportunities made available to people out-of-school such as young school leavers, the employed and the unemployed and so on in order to cope with new situations of life. It is an educational activity fashioned out to help beneficiaries or participants make up for or save lost ground as well as for those who did not attend school at all or started but dropped out owing to some reasons. Such education can be provided as part-time or full time and is often without limit (Egunyomi, 1999).

The importance of continuing education as a lifelong learning in the life of women cannot be overemphasised. Continuing Education programmes are designed to meet identified or expressed adult learning needs. Continuous learning is critical to renewing the expertise and skills needed to cope with the changes in our contemporary society brought about by technology. Women must continually expand their scope of knowledge in order to keep up with the rate of change.

The major focus of continuing education is the provision of educational opportunities for all categories of individuals irrespective of whatever failure was earlier recorded thereby ensuring continuity in education, ensuring the continued relevance of the individuals in the society; ensuring the provision or access to education for all citizens; and helping retrieve the economic wastage that early school learners would have constituted (Egunyomi, 1999).

Background Information of Centre for Continuing Education, FUTO

The FUTO Centre for Continuing Education formerly known as FUTO Extension Services(FES) was established in 1997 as an outreach learning provider. It was then conceived as a way of taking the University to top business executives who may have reached the highest echelon of their

organisations, but requiring a few months intensive course to upgrade their academic standing. The plan then was to award the Executive Masters of Business degree to successful candidates.

Somehow, given what was going on in university campuses at the time, FUTO was drawn into the scramble for outreach centres across the country to boost internally generated revenue: so, from 1997 to 2001, FES established up to 12 centres across the country. In 2001, the Federal Government through the National Universities Commission banned all the satellite campuses nationwide. The FUTO management did not hesitate in implementing the ban. They closed down all the centres and asked students to come down to FUTO for documentation and that move marked the rebirth of FES in 2003. The FES organised intensive sandwich and weekend study programmes during the long vacation and other weekends of the year. In 2006, the name FES was changed to Centre for Continuing Education.

The philosophy of FUTO and objective of FUTO Centre for Continuing Education is to take education to the people (gown-to-town) with a view to reducing the gap in technological growth and economic advancement between Nigeria and the

developed countries. The vision is to enable the disadvantaged mature individuals to become self-actualised in their chosen career.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the extent of participation of women in continuing education towards their contribution to sustainable development.

Specifically, the study aimed to find out:

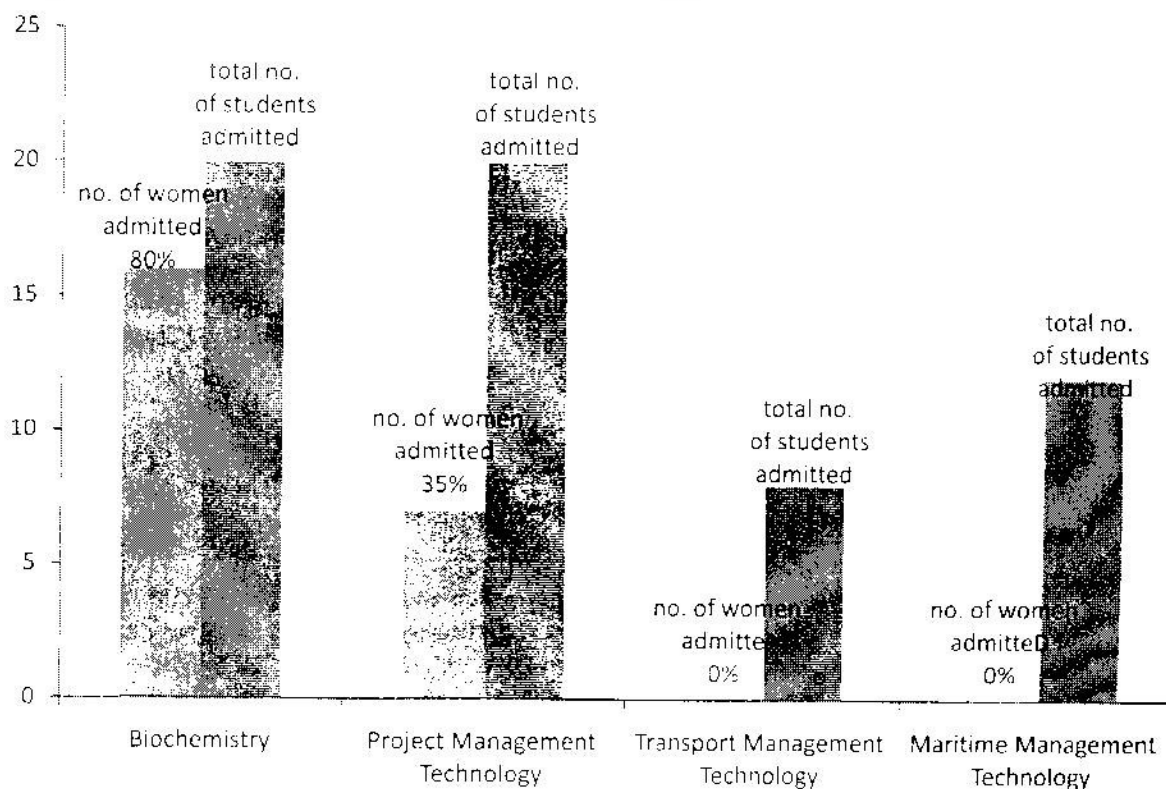
- The proportion of women who are engaged in continuing education programme in FUTO;
- area of their interest;
- reasons for their engagement in continuing education;
- suggestions and ways of enhancing continuing education for sustainable development.

Method

The team used document analysis and questionnaire to collect data. Students documentation in Centre for Continuing Education FUTO was used for data collection. Graphs, tables and percentages were used for data analysis. Undergraduate students from 100 level to 300 level were studied.

Findings

The proportion of women who are involved in continuing education Programme in FUTO from 2013/2014 to 2015/2016



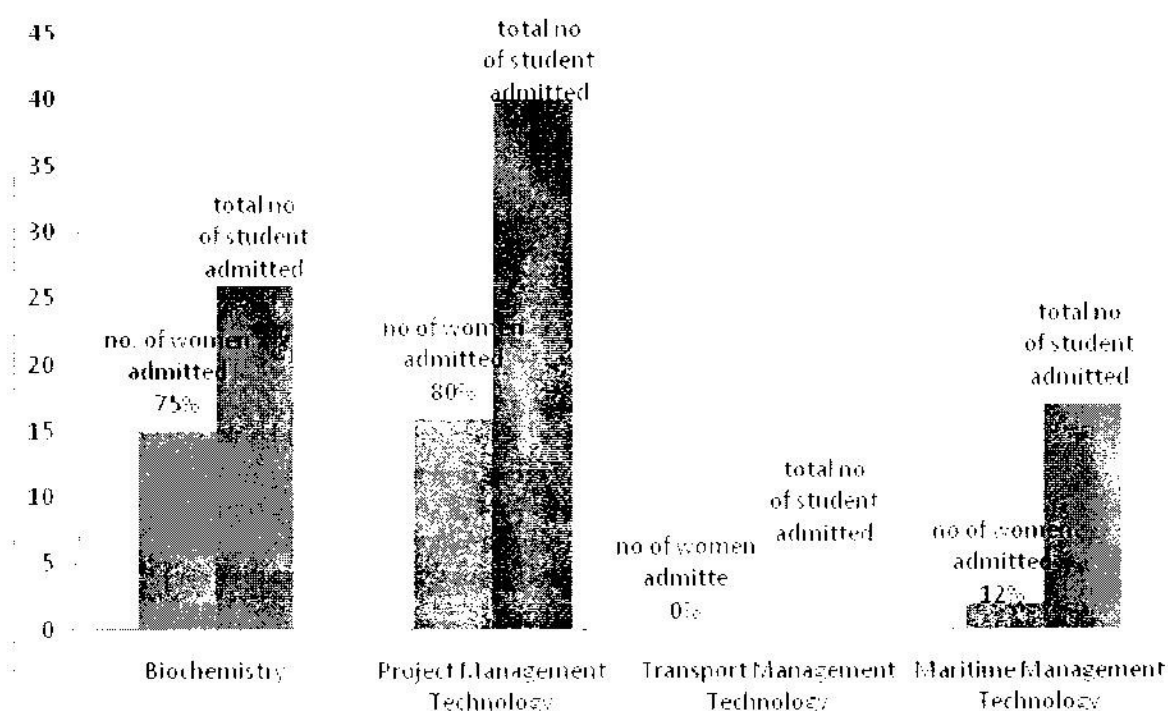
300 Level Students of Centre for Continuing Education Futo 2013/2014 Academic Year

Figure 1. The number of women involved in continuing education programme in 2013/2014 academic year

Figure 1 shows that in 2013/2014 academic year of 300 level undergraduate students, the total number of students admitted was 67 and 20 students were women while 47 were men. The figure also revealed that a total number of twenty (20) students was admitted in 2013/2014 session to study Biochemistry and 16 (80%) out of the 20 students were women. Furthermore, those admitted to study Project Management Technology were 27 in number and 7 (35%) were women, while those admitted to study Transport Management and Maritime Management Technology were 8 and 12 in number respectively and none was a woman.

From this result, the total number of women involved in the programme of continuing

education was 21 out of 67 students that were admitted in 2013/2014 session. The figure further revealed that the students offered only four courses namely Biochemistry, Project Management, Transport Management and Maritime Technology. Findings revealed that following the directives of NUC, the University Management struck out most of the courses being offered by students. Such courses include Public Health Technology which is known to attract a lot of female applicants. This accounted for the limited number of women in the centre for Continuing Education in FUTO.



200 LEVEL STUDENTS OF CENTRE FOR CONTINUOUS EDUCATION FUTO 2014 2015 ACADEMIC YEAR

Figure 2. The number of women involved in Continuing Education Programme in 2014/2015 Academic Year.

Figure 2 shows that in 2014/2015 academic year of 300 levels undergraduate students, the total number of students admitted was 83 and 33 students were women, while 50 students were men. The figure also revealed that 26 out of 83 students registered for Biochemistry. 15(75%) out of that 26 were women. Also 40 students were admitted to study Project Management. 16(80%) out of 40 were women; 2 women registered for Maritime

Management Technology out of 17 students and no student registered for Transport Management Technology.

From this result, the total number of women involved in the programme of Continuing Education was 33 out of 83 students that were admitted in 2014/2015 session.

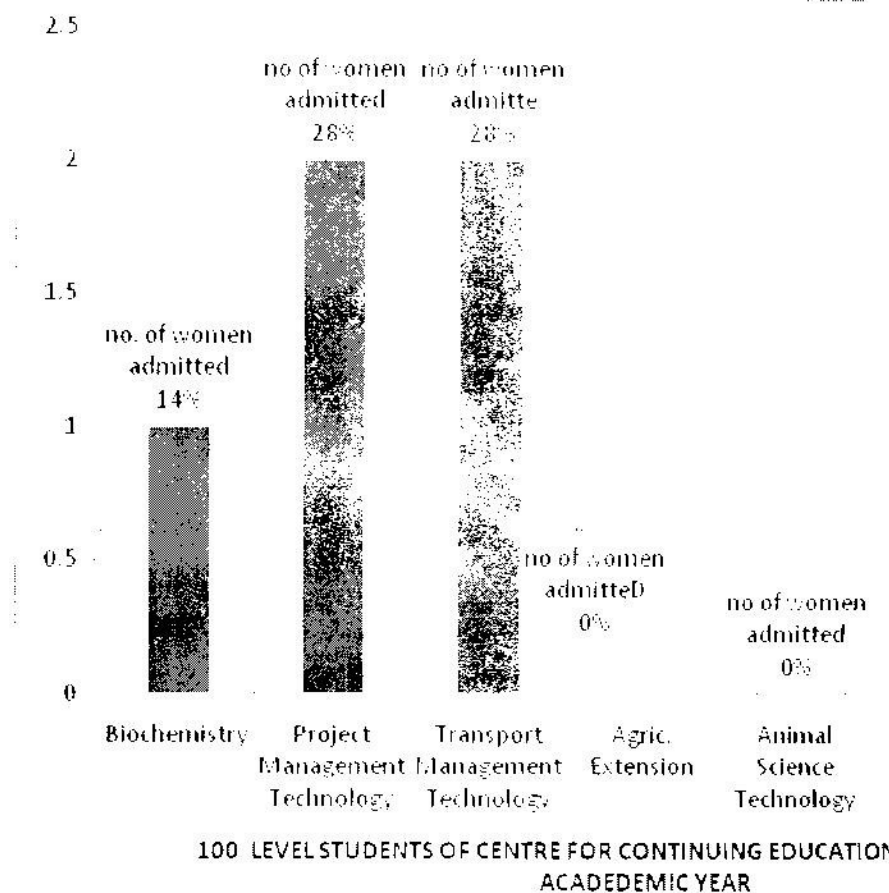


Figure 3: The number of women involved in continuing education programme in 2015/2016 academic years

The analysis shows that only 7 students have enrolled so far in the Department of Biochemistry, 2 in project Management Technology and none enrolled in Agricultural Extension and Animal Science & technology. As at the time of this research, only these few

students have indicated interest. Also, this delay in enrolment shows that students are no more interested in the programme in FUTO because their areas of interest are not accommodated in the programme.

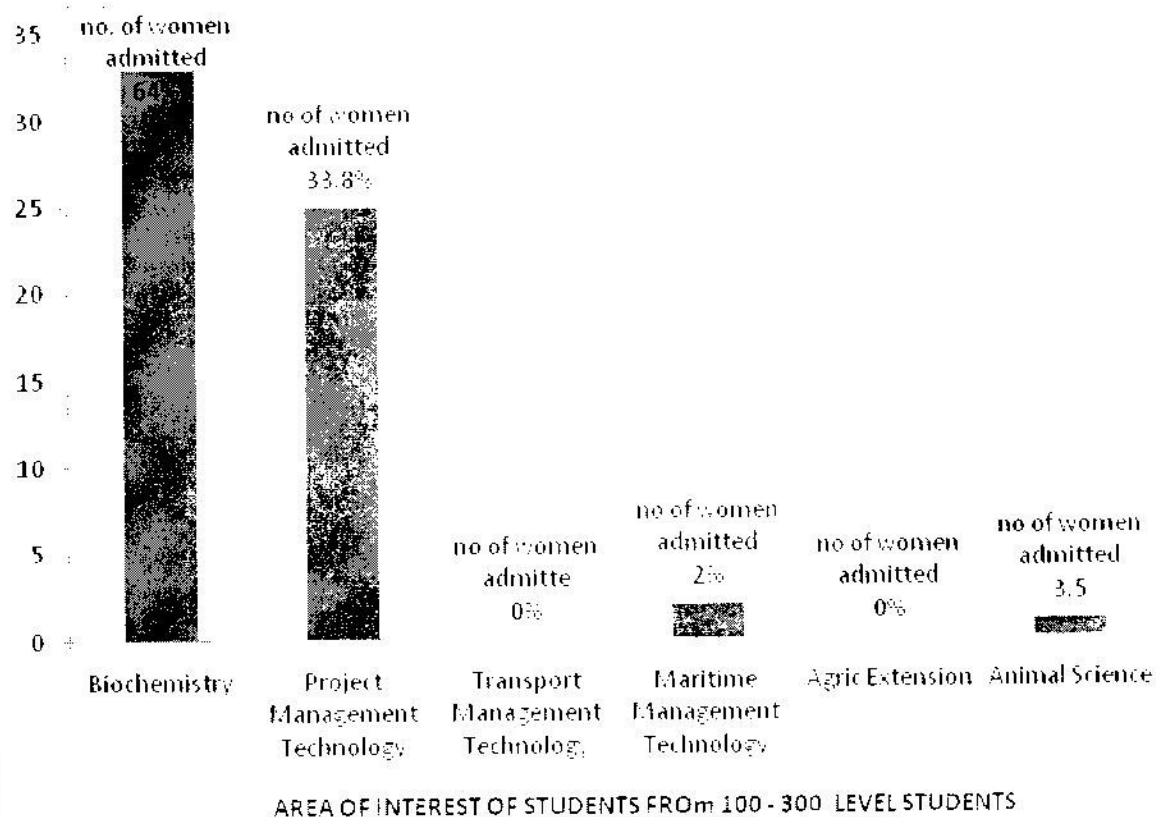


Figure 4: Areas of their interest from 100 level - 300 level

Figure 5 above reveals the areas of interest of women in Continuing Education Programme in FUTO. From the above, it is obvious that women in Continuing Education in FUTO specialise mainly in Biochemistry (64.7%), followed by Project Management (33.8%).

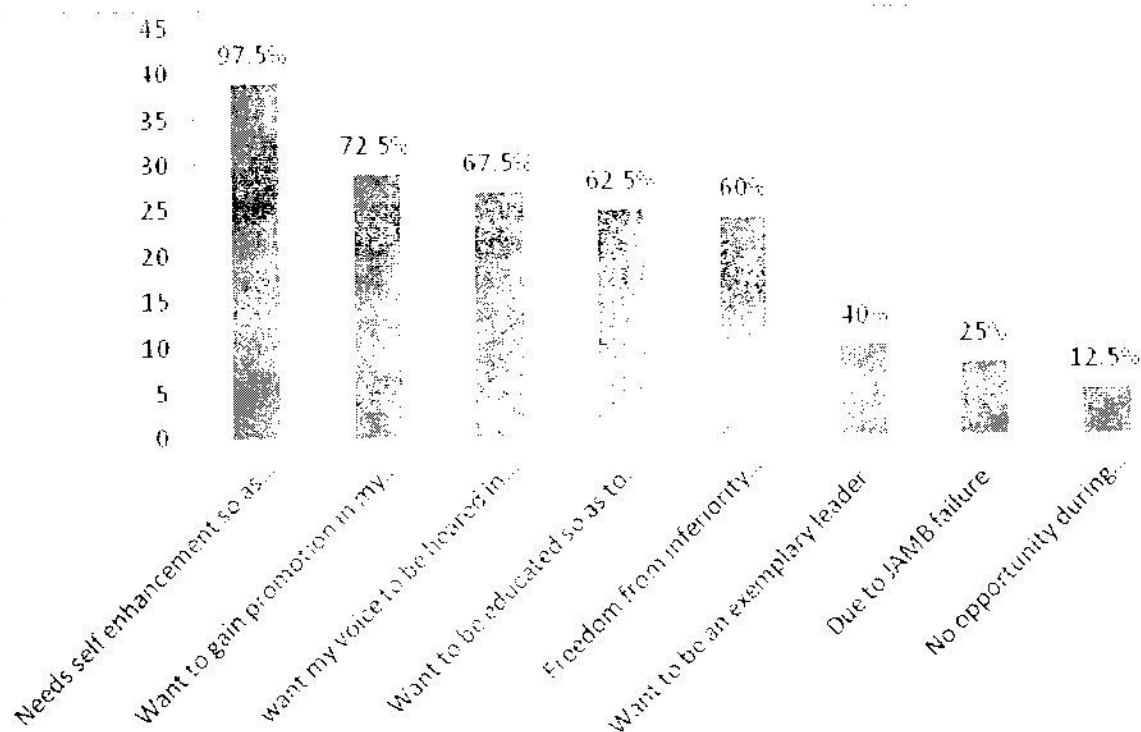


Figure 5: Reasons for enrolment into Continuing Education Programme

The above Figure shows the reasons for students' involvement in the programme.

97.5% of the students was in the programme because they needed self-enhancement to fit into the global change; 72.5% was doing it to gain promotion in their work places; 67.5% was in it for their voices to be heard in the society; 60% was in the programme to be free from inferiority complex; 40% said they want to be exemplary leaders; 25% was doing the programme because they failed JAMB post-UTME and 12.5% was in the programme because they had no opportunity in their childhood to go to school. There were different reasons for different students that were in the programme but all geared towards a sustainable development of people and society. Therefore, the importance of women in continuing education for sustainable development cannot be overemphasised. Sustainable development will never be successful without continuing education.

Conclusion

A conscious women continuing education programme for achieving sustainable development goals can be modified towards equipping and empowering women. This should involve social, economic, political and cultural lives of women. The concept of sustainable development emphasises not only economic development, but also social, political and cultural development and the need to conserve the environment and its natural resources. The FUTO Management and FUTO Women Association should empower and encourage the poor women at the grassroot communities to continue their education programme.

Recommendations

- Proper laws and policies should be formulated by the government at various levels that will help defend the rights and privileges of women to acquire formal education of their choice.
- Appropriate human, financial and material resources should be provided to support women education in the country. These resources would help to provide comfortable environment

for women to study and contribute effectively to self and national development.

- Federal University of Technology Owerri Women Association (FUTOWA) should advocate gender equality through education of women.
- Federal University of Technology Owerri Women Association (FUTOWA) should engage in awareness programmes through talks, lectures, announcement and the mass media in order to enlighten and encourage more women participation in continuing education.

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