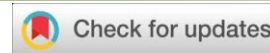


Original Research Report



Strategies for Enhancing Gender Equity among Railway Workers in Lagos State, Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract: The study determined the strategies needed for enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State South West Nigeria. The design of the study was descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 482 and the sample size was 217 consisting of 112 senior and 105 junior staff of Nigerian Railway Corporation Ebute-Metta Lagos. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using mean. Findings revealed that the strategies for promoting gender equity are creating an inclusive gender diverse working environment, identifying and preventing gender biases, treating all staff equally, putting equality policies in place, among others. Findings also indicated that the challenges to enhancing gender equity included gender biases, not giving proper value to women's work among others. Findings also showed that some of the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity included treating all workers with respect and considering, offering mentorship program, organizing focus group discussions, encouraging diversity program, and supporting women in more senior roles. It was concluded that Interventions such as gender analysis, functional and adult literacy and kicking against office female harassment are needed for enhancing gender equity. It was recommended that awareness should be created by government at all level on the need for equal right for men and women in workplaces, more emphasis should be placed on the need to inculcate gender equity education into the curriculum for secondary and tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Equity, Families, Gender, Railway, Workers

1. Introduction

There is a deeply ingrained idea in our society that men are the movers and shakers in the business world. They are the Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers and so on. They are seen as the ones who make things happen (Ziman, 2013). This may have been true years back but today we are seeing a new and very interesting trend. Women are currently making great strides in the business world and the ratio of men to women is beginning to even out. While the participation of women in the workforce and the level of their education are increasing, some major factors are also holding them back. These factors among others, contribute to the enormous setbacks for women and overall gender inequality that has developed in the modern workplaces such as the federal and state government sector as well as private sector. The subtle gender bias that persist in the organizations and in the society disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). This problem needs to be addressed because new research has shown that women in leadership roles bring higher profitability, new and effective leadership styles, and many other benefits to an organization or company (Ziman, 2013). Gender is a factor influencing work patterns. Gender also refers to the biological sex of an individual usually male or female and sometimes intersex. It is the sociocultural phenomenon of the division of people into various categories such as male and female with each having an associated role. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviors of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Since gender roles are learned it means that both genders when trained and given equal opportunity will function well. According to UNESCO (2003), equality should therefore be the watchword. Equal treatment of women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities, and society at large or fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men.

Gender equity means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equity also means equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play as well as the process of being fair to men and women. (UNESCO, 2003). Gender equality, on the other hand, has become one of the central themes in global treaties, covenants and declarations principally due to the understanding that it is a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies which is targeted at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance and profitably productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provide men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation institutions and processes (Ejumudo, 2013).

Gender inequality is a workplace issue in Nigeria especially in the Railway sector. Many women experience gender equality in the workplace. This is because all female employees do not have access to enjoy the same reward, resources and opportunities most times in a male dominated department. There is a long history of regulation and activism around the lack of women's equality in the Nigerian Railway workforce. However, progress towards equality has been slow and this is shown particularly by the under representation of women in management statistics and the operation and commercial Department, it can also be seen in the continued gender responsibility and gender segregation by the Cooperation. The implementation of practices that affect gender equality in the workplace is very key to its success and achieving gender equality in the workplace is a unique journey of development and sustainability for any of such organization. Achieving gender equality in the workplace can be understood as a journey, requiring deliberate action for any serious

organization and this will become more equitable over time (Strachan et al., 2010). Nigerian Railway Corporation is one of such organization that should engage in a deliberate action in other to achieve gender equity especially in its managerial cadre, operations and commercial department, as locomotive drivers, civil engineering and mechanical departments that are seen as a places meant for the men alone.

Railway is a route between two places along which trains travel on steel rails. It is also a system and network of tracks that trains travel on. Rail as a mode of transport by its nature enjoys the advantages of its capacity in many areas over and above other modes, particularly in being able to move sizeable volume of traffic of any description from one point to the other (Offiah, 2014). Nigerian Railway Cooperation was established in the year 1898 with a vital role of moving of goods and passengers in a well-planned and coordinated network transport system. The Railway system has three outstanding duties towards the user of Railway service and they are providing adequate transport services, reducing the traffic as economically as possible, making adequate use of provided rolling stock and equipment as much as possible in ensuring a reliable, available and maintained train service. (Offiah, 2014). The main objective of railway is therefore to provide safe, efficient, comfortable, affordable, regular, reliable, fast and environmentally friendly services. The Headquarters of the Nigerian Railway Corporation is located at Ebute-Metta in Lagos State while the entire network is organized into seven autonomous districts namely, Lagos.

The Railway system has been undergoing full support of the Federal Government through the ministry of transport in such areas as track rehabilitation, supply of locomotives and rolling stock, upgrading of signaling system from manual to semi-automatic as well as installation of micro-wave telecommunication systems (Ogbonna, 2011). There is the presence and competitive activities of women in a workplace like the Nigerian Railway Corporation. Even though there is the commonality of a general belief system that the best place for women is in the 'Kitchen' (Makama, 2013). This trend has brought about tremendous misrepresentation of women right at the level of the family down to the circular society. Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women. Women are therefore discriminated upon from acquiring formal education, mistreated and perpetually kept as house-helps, forced into early marriages, street hawking, the instrument of wide-range trafficking, and a misfit in society. Thus, the purported irrelevance associated with the status of women in society has merely reduced an average woman to an inferior commodity.

Women are often evaluated for promotions primarily on performance, while men are often promoted on potential (Barsh and Yee, 2011). Not only is this unfair, it can inhibit qualified female employees from being promoted. Job performance is not only a function of the efforts of the individual; several other factors are at play. The individual's management style, emotional intelligence, team spirit, the state of the company, and the nature of the work are all factors that impact an employee's performance. If they affect the employee negatively, then the employee's performance will suffer. (Makama, 2013). This may not impact the promotion potential for men, as they are evaluated on what they can do, but could be a great detriment to women who are evidently evaluated solely on what they have done. A company could try to combat this in a very systematic way It is therefore important that all forms of inhuman discrimination and gender inequality in workplaces be challenged and a deliberate, sensitive, consistent and systematic approach of gender relations be applied to achieve this.

Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices. In some establishments women are not allowed to get married or become pregnant because it is thought that it will reduce their productivity and of course profit. Makama (2013) reported that to mainstream gender equality as a business issue, progress can be made through goal setting and evaluation. Gotsis and Kortezi (2015) opined that many frameworks for gender equality encompass this approach, including the United Nations' Women's Empowerment Principles (UNA, 2012) which opined that rapid road map conceptualizes an organization's journey to workplace gender equality. Avoidance and compliance with legislation through a series of stages towards a sustainable, strategic approach to gender equality is a key focus areas that makes up essential components of a comprehensive equality strategy. Stakeholder's engagement, leadership accountability, strategy and business case, measurement and reporting, policies and processes, supply chain, gender composition, gender pay equity, flexibility, talent pipeline, leader and manager capability, and gender inclusive culture are all vital to achieving workplace equity (Uddin, Ali & Khan, 2020). Interventions such as gender analysis, functional and adult literacy, kicking against office female harassment, addressing strategic gender interests should focus on fundamental issues relating to women subordination and gender inequities. Strategic gender interests are long-term and are often related to structural changes in society regarding women's status and equity. These includes legislation for equal rights, reproductive choice, and increased participation in decision-making. The position of women in society in relation to men, the subordination, oppression and marginalization of women has attracted the attention of scholars, activists and so on. It is against this background that this paper examined the strategies for enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State in South-West Nigeria.

1.1. Statement of Problem

A cursory observation shows that there is a deeply ingrained idea in our society that men are the movers and shakers in the business world. They are the Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and so on. They are seen as the ones who make things happen (Ziman, 2013). So many factors such as marriage, childbearing, self-belief, timidity, fear of being judged, and inferiority complex among others tend to hold women back. These factors contribute to the enormous setbacks for women and overall gender inequality that has developed in modern workplaces such as the federal and state government sector as well as the private sector. The subtle gender bias that persists in organizations and in society disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). This problem needs to be addressed because new research has shown that women in leadership roles bring higher profitability, new and effective leadership styles, and many other benefits to an organization or company (Ziman, 2013). Several studies have addressed strategies for enhancing gender equity among female workers in other organizations but none of the reviewed studies focused on strategies for enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State, South West Nigeria. This is the gap filled by the study in the research.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the strategies for enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify:

- (a) Ways of enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State.
- (b) Challenges to enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State.
- (c) Ways of removing challenges to enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

- (a) What are the ways of enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State?
- (b) What are the challenges to enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State?
- (c) What are the ways of removing challenges to enhancing gender equity among railway workers in Lagos State?

2. Materials and Methods

1.1. Design for the Study

The study adopted a descriptive survey design.

2.1.1. Ethics Statement

The research ethics approval was obtained from the institution of the principal investigator in accordance with the guidelines of the American Psychology Association. Furthermore, the researchers obtained oral consent from the participants.

2.2. Area of the Study

The study was carried out in Ebute-Metta Lagos State, Southwest Nigeria. Lagos state was chosen because of the staff strength. It has both the headquarters and the Lagos district situated in Ebute-Metta.

2.3. Population and Sample

The population for this study was four hundred and eighty-two (482). This comprises of the entire staff of Nigerian Railway Cooperation in Lagos State made up of 212 junior staff and 270 senior staff (Source: Human Resource Department). Sample for this study was two hundred and seventeen (217) which comprised of 105 junior staff and 112 senior staff. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determination of sample size. According to Krejcie and Morgan, (1970), for population between 400 and 500, 217 respondents can be used. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the 105 junior staff and 112 senior staff.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Two structured questionnaires developed by the researchers were used for data collection. The first questionnaire was developed for junior staff while the second questionnaire was developed for senior staff. This was meant to generate responses on ways of enhancing gender equity, challenges to enhancing gender equity, and ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity all among railway workers in Lagos State, Each questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A sought for demographic characteristics of the respondents while section B generated items based on the purposes of the study and research questions. Section B also contains rating scale items as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) = 2 Strongly Disagree (SD) =1.

2.5. Data Collection Technique

Data for the study was collected by the researchers with the aid of two research assistants. These assistants were trained by the researchers through orientation on the purpose and nature of the study, and how to distribute, collect, and handle the retrieved copies of the questionnaire. For questionnaires that were not retrieved on the spot, the research assistants helped in retrieving them on agreed later dates. The research assistants also helped in interpreting the questionnaire for the respondents.

2.6. Data Analysis Technique

Data collected were analyzed using mean. For the decision rule, the real limits of the number of respondents made were used to categorize the mean ratings of the respondents. Mean ratings from 2.50 ratio and above were considered as agreed upon while items with mean ratings of 2.49 and below were considered as disagreed upon. After the data collection, it was cued into IBM SPSS software version 28. The demographic variables and other category variables were entered as variables and data views.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Mean Responses on the ways of enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State.

No.	Ways of promoting gender equity	Mean	Remarks
1	Creating an inclusive gender-diverse working environment	3.0	Agreed
2	Identifying and preventing gender biases	2.5	Agreed
3	Preventing indirect discrimination	3.5	Agreed
4	Treating all staff equally	4.0	Agreed
5	Putting equality policies in place	3.5	Agreed
6	Using objective criteria in assigning official responsibilities	3.4	Agreed
7	Penalize gender-based harassment	4.0	Agreed
8	Make result-driven evaluation	3.0	Agreed
9	Allowing women to compete	4.0	Agreed

The presentation in table 1 showed that the respondents agreed that ways of promoting gender equity are through creating an inclusive gender diverse working environment, identifying and preventing gender biases, preventing indirect discrimination, treating all staff equally, putting equality policies in place, using objective criteria in assigning official responsibilities, penalizing gender based harassment, making result driven evaluation and allowing women to compete. The mean values ranged from 2.5 to 4.0 which is above the cutoff point of 2.5.

Table 2. Mean responses on the Challenges to Enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State.

No.	Challenges to Enhancing Gender Equity	Mean	Remarks
1	Lack of flexible work arrangement	3.5	Agreed
2	Gender bias	3.4	Agreed
3	Not giving proper value to women's work	3.3	Agreed
4	Weak coordination and mentorship mechanism	3.0	Agreed
5	Non inclusiveness of women in decision making	3.7	Agreed
6	Undermining women ability to lead	4.0	Agreed
7	Male selfish interest	2.4	Disagreed
8	Occupational segregation	4.0	Agreed
9	Employment trend	2.5	Agreed
10	Qualification and skill mismatch	2.3	Disagreed

From Table 2, two out of the ten items were agreed upon as challenges to enhancing gender equity. Eight of the items had mean values ranging from 2.5 to 4.0 which is above the cutoff point of 2.5. Hence, the items agreed upon as challenges to enhancing gender equity included lack of flexible work arrangement, gender biases, not giving proper value to women's work, weak coordination and mentorship mechanism, non-inclusiveness of women in decision making undermining women ability to lead, occupational segregation and employment trend, On the other hand the respondents disagreed that male selfish interest (Mean =2.4) and qualification and skill mismatch (mean = 2.3) were challenges to enhancing gender equity. The mean values were below the cutoff point of 2.5.

Table 3: Mean responses on the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State.

No.	Ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity	Mean	Remarks
1	Treating all workers with respect and Consideration	3.0	Agreed
2	Offer mentorship program	3.4	Agreed
3	Organize focus group discussion	2.5	Agreed
4	Encourage diversity program	3.0	Agreed
5	Support women in more senior roles	2.7	Agreed
6	Implement gender neutral recruitment process	3.0	Agreed
7	Provide training on unconscious bias	2.7	Agreed
8	Promote a culture of meritocracy	3.0	Agreed

Analysis in Table 3 showed that all the listed items were agreed upon as ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity. All the mean values ranged from 2.5 to 3.4 which were all above the cutoff point of 2.5. Hence the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity included treating all workers with respect and considering, offering mentorship program, organizing focus group discussions, encouraging diversity program, supporting women in more senior roles, implementing gender neutral recruitment process, providing training on unconscious bias and promoting a culture of meritocracy are some of the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity.

Findings revealed that the respondents agreed that some of the ways of promoting gender equity are through creating an inclusive gender-diverse working environment, identifying and preventing gender biases, preventing indirect discrimination, treating all staff equally, putting equality policies in place, using objective criteria in assigning official responsibilities,

penalizing gender-based harassment, making result driven evaluation and allowing women to compete favorably with men. Thus, with a gender equality road map, there could be a progressive journey to workplace gender equality. The findings also agrees with the assertion of Uddin, Ali and Khan (2020) that the issue of workplace flexibility is strategic in the sense that gender interests and other interventions that addresses the issue of gender inequities are long-term and are often related to structural changes in the society especially those relating to women status. The respondents affirmed that lack of flexible work arrangements, gender biases, and not giving proper value to women work is one of the challenges to enhancing gender equity. This is in line with (Strachan et al., 2010) assertion that achieving gender equality in the workplace can be understood as a journey requiring deliberate action for organizations to become more equitable over time.

Findings also revealed that treating all workers with respect and consideration, offering mentorship program, organizing focus group discussion, encouraging, diversifying workplace programs and supporting women who carry out more senior and complex roles, implementing gender neutral recruitment process, providing training on unconscious bias and promoting a culture of meritocracy are some of the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity. This also corroborates Gotsis and Kortezi (2015) that progress concerning gender equality can be made through a realistic goal setting and constant evaluation. This also agrees with the work of Makama, (2013) who reported that all forms of inhuman discrimination and gender inequality in workplaces should be challenged and a deliberate, sensitive, consistent and systematic approach of gender relations should be applied to achieve equity. The findings from this study have implications for the management, junior and senior staff of the Nigerian Railway Corporation and policymakers. This is because the management would adopt measures aimed at promoting gender equity among junior, senior staff as well as among male and female staff. This research has limitation in the following areas: data gathering, distribution of questionnaire to busy staff of the Nigerian Railway Corporation, time constraint and financial challenges. Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended that awareness should be created on the need for equal right for men and women in workplaces. More emphasis should be placed on the need to inculcate gender equity education into the curriculum. Curriculum reformers to consider the inclusion of gender education into the curriculum. National gender policy should be enacted into laws to provide a legal framework for gender mainstreaming in the national development plan. Coalition amongst female Railway workers should be encouraged by the management. Mentoring should form part of organizational policies. Male counterparts should form the major part of the mentorship team. There should be gender inclusive culture. Workplace flexibility, which entails a variety of measures that may include part-time work, working from home, reduced hours and other forms has to be identified as a key way for employees to balance their work and outside life because women tends to accommodate traditional caring responsibilities in the home.

4. Conclusion

This study examined strategies for enhancing gender equity among Railway workers in Lagos State Southwest Nigeria. Findings revealed that the strategies for promoting gender equity are equal pay, considering leadership roles for women, workplace transparency, strict and effective policies against female harassment, promotions, and placement to be on merit, equal opportunities for both men and women and formulation and implementation of strict policies against gender discrimination in workplaces by the federal government. Also, lack of flexible work arrangement, gender biases, not giving proper value to women's work, weak co-ordination and mentorship mechanism,

non-inclusiveness of women in decision making, undermining women ability to lead, male counterparts selfish interest, occupational segregation, employment trend, qualification and skill mismatch are some of the challenges to enhancing gender equity among Railway workers. The study also revealed that treating all workers with respect and consideration, offering mentorship program, organizing focus group discussion, encouraging diversity program, supporting women in more senior roles and implementing gender neutral recruitment process are some of the ways of reducing challenges to enhancing gender equity among Railway Workers.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

The study's conceptualization, investigation, review of the literature method, and data analysis were done by KPO, FNO and BIA.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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