
PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education has special benefits for girls, both when they are young and later as adult women. The influence on child bearing patterns is one of the most important pathways through which education affects the lives of girls and women. Educated women tend to marry later, have fewer children and are likely to understand what they must do to protect themselves and their families from many diseases. Investment in girls' education most likely will yield some of the highest returns on all developmental investments by generating both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families and society at large. Girl-child education is as important as boy-child education. When a girl is educated, everyone around her will feel her impact starting from the home, her environment and society. She becomes a productive asset and not a liability making meaningful investments. This paper, therefore, recommends that, there is a need for government and other relevant stakeholders to organize more campaigns and awareness on the importance of girl-child education and also emphasize the negative outcomes of not educating the girl-child. Programmes that promote girl-child education should be promoted in all our communities. The people must be sensitized to the community and social benefits of educating girls. This will help to disabuse the minds of parents, girls and the society on the non-challant attitude they have towards girl-child education.

Keywords: *Girl-Child Education, Prospects and Challenges.*

Introduction

The development of any society would be grossly lopsided if the girl child is not given quality education. Education in any society is accepted as an instrument to power, prestige, survival, greatness and advancement for men and women. According to Osinulu (1994), the United Nations General Assembly (2001) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which stipulates that everyone has the right to education which shall be free at least in elementary and primary stages. Similarly, the National Policy on Education emphasizes among other things that, there will be equal opportunities for all citizens.

However, Osinulu (1994) lamented that, the girl child is discriminated against in terms of education and given out to marriage early. Thereby, denying the Girl-Child the required competences for community development.

Education is a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. A positive correlation exists between the enrollment of girls in primary school and the gross national product and increase of life expectancy (Ejikeme, 2000). As a result of this correlation, enrollment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in any

society. Rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the caliber of women and their education in that country. Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills.

In recognition of the fact that, in many countries, both developed and developing, the status of girls is significantly worse than that of boys. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, identified the persistent discrimination against the girl-child and the violation of her rights as one of the twelve (12) critical areas of concern requiring urgent attention by governments and the international community among which is the need for increasing girl-child education. Without access to education, girls are denied the knowledge and skills needed to advance their status. By educating girls, societies stand to gain economically. In Nigeria today, the women folk have come a long way in business, politics, education, sports and other professions. They have made an indelible mark in their efforts to conquer the limitations of the past which have sought to place them permanently in the “kitchen” and “bedroom”. However, it is not all through a bed of roses for women and their empowerment. Majority of Nigerian women have not been fully mobilized and empowered to contribute to national development.

Concept of Girl-Child Education

The concept of girl-child education incorporates the necessary attitude, cultural and behavioral training which parents give to their daughters at home to enable them become useful, resourceful and respectful citizens of their countries. It also includes the functional teaching or training in skills acquisition which many girls undertake in the shades of seamstress or in computer

training centres, weaving/fashion designing centres as well as catering and interior decoration centres, etc. Most importantly, the concept is over specialized and highly controlled trainings acquired in schools, colleges and other institutions of higher learning (Chidebelu, 2009). Ejikeme (2000) captured this fact when he said that, denying girl-children access to early childhood education makes them socially excluded, creating room for them to grow up to become illiterate women in later life and be classified as disadvantaged candidates for adult education, women empowerment programmes and other women rescue remedial or support programmes that smack off under-development. Unfortunately, the right of a girl-child to access quality education has been denied and there are consequences. Though some of the challenges are deeply rooted in our traditional background, they have affected the society at large. Mangvwat, (2005) agreed with this when she says that, operation and discrimination against women and girls have been so deeply ingrained, for so long in virtually every culture.

Within the context of education, many scholars have defined girl-child education in various ways. The National Child Welfare Policy (1989) as cited by Ada (2007) defined girl-child as a person below 14 years of age. Offorma (2009) defined girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stage of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into women and marry. She is conditional to look after the young ones, the home and kitchen. Girl-child education is a catch-all term for a complexity of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary

education and health education for females, (Okernmor, Ndit and Filshak, 2012).

Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. Today's girl-child education is for her tomorrow's living. Afebendeugne in Ugwu (2001) defined women education as the education that would make a woman become aware of herself and her capacity to exploit her environment, and involves training in literacy and vocational skills to enable her become functional in the society. When maternal care is adequately provided for the girl-child, the aims and objectives of education would be achieved. However, current efforts, including national and global programmes, have been to target increased enrollment of the girl-child into the different levels of education in Nigeria. The federal government introduced the Universal Basic Education Programme to provide cheap and affordable education to all and sundry. Most, if not all the state governments in Nigeria, have also introduced free and compulsory pre-primary and primary and secondary schools for both male and female children in various states. Again, most state governments have also passed the child rights and protection acts that will eliminate (or at least reduce) the withdrawal of the girl-child from school and to prevent parents or guardians from using their school age children to hawk or do endless labour activities. This is so important because it promotes girl-child education which chances nation building.

The girl-child should be made to know that, education is empowerment and when she is empowered, she can fight for her rights and exercise such. Education of the girl-child, therefore, must be seen as a priority in the educational process of any nation. This calls for bridging the existing

gender gap in education before any enduring success can be achieved. Lack of education of the girl-child denies her the knowledge and skills needed to advance her status and so, she remains below the poverty level, wasting away in abject poverty worsened by illnesses and diseases. When a girl-child is educated, she is able to realize her full potentials, think, question and judge independently, develop civic sense, learn to respect her fellow human beings and be a good citizen (Girl-child campaign, government of India-www.read-org/publication-16-10-07).

Prospects of Girl-Child Education

It could be said that, education is essential for both boys and girls, the benefits of educating girl-child tend to be greater. This is so because girl-child education has been found to have a more significant impact on poverty reduction and provision of sustainable development. Abdul (2003), referring to a UNESCO report (1991), said that, the education of a girl is vital for the effective preparation of today's girls into tomorrow's responsible adult women. The female child, just like the male child is entitled to all the citizenship rights, one of which is access to compulsory basic education and opportunity for higher education depending on her ability. According to Agun (1996), education should be given to all citizens irrespective of gender, because in the history of man, education is the most significant invention that has ever been made. Education serves as the means through which the society maintains its survival and perpetuates itself. Through education, society is managed, maintained and prevented from falling into chaos and decay, and man is able to live, control and adjust to changes in his environment.

Adedokun and Olufunke (2010) on the view that the girl-child can only claim

these rights and exercise them if she understands what they mean and their implications upon her livelihood and dignity. The girl-child should, therefore, be made to know that education is empowerment and when she is empowered, she can fight for her rights and exercise such. Education of the girl-child, therefore, must be seen as a priority in the educational process of any nation. This calls for bridging the existing gender gap in education before any enduring success can be recorded. Lack of education of the girl-child denies her the knowledge and skills needed to advance her status and so she remains below the poverty level, wasting away in abject poverty worsened by illnesses and diseases. When a girl-child is educated, she is able to realize her full potentials, think, question and judge independently, develop civic sense, learn to respect her fellow human beings and be a good citizen (Korode, 2008).

When the girl-child is educated, her knowledge base is expanded, she is able to understand and undertake socio-economic, cultural and political transformations necessary to achieve development. Education of the female child is positively related to her living standard and the only effective scheme to alleviate poverty. To achieve this, is to expand the educational opportunities available to the girl-child (Adamu, 2005). The type of education being prescribed for the girl-child is one that will make her/self-reliant (FRN, 2004). With education, a girl-child is made to be aware of fight against powerful social structures, cultural traditional practices and attitudes that may retard progress in the society. Adedokun & Olufunke (2010), opined that, educating a girl-child will, therefore, help her socialize, reproduce knowledge and even lead her towards the production of new knowledge.

Gubio (1995), in Walkibe (2003), stated that, the female should be sufficiently

educated to be accepted, loved, respected and adored in her society. With sufficient education, she is prepared to contribute to the development of the society, socially, economically, politically, morally, intellectually and spiritually as well as technologically. Gubio was particular about female education because he argued that an educated mind can hardly be misled but the uneducated and uninformed can be bent at any moment of emotional expression. That is why Bukar (2004) in Onojah (2017) argued that, gender differences ought to be an irrelevant consideration in the schools, employment, the courts and legislation so that women and girls can participate in paid work on an equal footing with men. Owing to this importance of education, it should not be seen as an exclusive reserve for the male-children, but the right to education should be for all. In education, lies communal spirit, in that, it helps people to respect the views of others by promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among the people of a community, races and nation (Anyanwu, 1992). To bring about all these positive changes that, could result from being educated, the female - child must not be excluded. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA, 1990) report emphasizes that, learning opportunity shall be expanded for all so that every individual will participate in the process of national building. To include everybody in the process of education, therefore, suitable programmes should be provided according to the needs of the people in the curriculum.

When the girl-child is educated, she is able to further the case of social justice and is tolerant socially, politically and emotionally. For education to be effective and impactful on the female children, there is need for citizen mobilization, there is need to bring awareness to parents on the importance of the education of the female – child and the pessimistic attitudes of people

to the girl-child change. The content of education should, therefore, be made more relevant to the girl-child so that she would be motivated to learn. This is so, because of her reproductive tendency and the influence she exerts on the children as the first teacher. To meet the needs of the society and to have poverty reduced, education of the female – child must be made viable in the light of the fact that, education is the key to personal as well as national development (Lassa, 1996). So, gender equity in education should be promoted so as to create a healthy educated and productive human base. Ukeje (2000) stated that, education is so powerful that, it can heal, kill, it can build up or tear apart; it can lift up or impoverish. Education is important in building up a sound individual with sound health, for the price of illiteracy is poverty and poverty is intricately linked with health. The more a child suffers from poverty, the more such a child is prone is to illness, disease and malnutrition and the more the girl and parents are susceptible to health problems. Female – children who are not educated cannot have adequate access to information on how to prevent diseases and this unenlightened tendency will prevent them from having access to medical treatment and health care services in the hospitals (Adedokun, 2010).

Education has special benefits for girls, both when they are young and later as adult women. The influence on child bearing patterns is one of the most important pathways through which education affects the lives of girls and women. Educated women tend to marry later, have fewer children and are likely to understand what they must do to protect themselves and their families from many diseases. Mangvwat (2010) in Onojah (2017) observed that, there is a link between educated mothers and the survival of their children. An educated mother is most likely to know that she and

her children can be safe from such preventable diseases as polio, measles, diphtheria and diarrhea through immunization. In specific terms, education can lead to many benefits, mortality, improvement of child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women's domestic role and their participation in the domain of politics, improvement of economic productivity and growth and protection of girls from HIV/AIDs, abuse and exploitation. Investment in girls' education, most likely, will yield some of the highest returns on all developmental investments by generating both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families and society at large (Idoko, 2009 in Onojah, 2017). Girl-child education is as important as boy-child education. When a girl is educated, everyone around her will feel her impact starting from the home, her environment and society. She becomes a productive asset and not a liability making meaningful investments.

Challenges of Girl-Child Education

Various studies have reported dwindling school enrolment of females in some parts of Nigeria especially the Northern geo-political zones. Some of the factors hindering the enrolment of females in schools include socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, ignorance, poverty, pre-marital pregnancy and religious belief. For a nation to achieve accelerated growth and development, both the male and female members of the country need to be properly educated. A nation that educates a part and leaves the other is like a bird flying with one wing. Thus, Nigeria needs to give girl-child education adequate attention, and provides the resources required. Some of the factors hindering the education of the girl-child as listed by Indabawa (2004) include the following:

- i. Early marriage: Girl-children are given off in marriage between the ages of ten and fourteen limiting their chances of being formally educated and with no provision for non-formal education for them in later life.
- ii. Hawking Practices: Girl-children are mostly found in these practices. The male-child education is much more valued than that of the girl-child so she is to help generate income to supplement the efforts of the parents. This robs her of access to education. To worsen matters, in the process of hawking she comes across unwanted pregnancy, which if care is not taken, leaves her suffering for her lifetime.
- iii. The poverty level of families: Most families are very poor, so they have to make a choice between girl-child's education and their male ones. Traditionally, since male-children are more valued, parents mostly resorted to making their choices to favour the education of the male child leaving the girl-child impoverished.
- iv. Societal attitude to girl-child: The girl-child is a weaker vessel, her place is in the kitchen, and she will use her education to benefit her husband, so why bother to send her to school? The societal attitude towards the girl-child is not in support of her education. This makes her education to be described as dwindling as and less than equal to that of their male counterparts.
- v. Low Self-concept: Another hindering factor is the girl-children's low self-concept. She sees herself as not being able to cope with the challenges of modern learning, so, she begins to find excuses, like, that after schooling. There are no job

opportunities so, it would be better for her to stay out of the reach of education. Solutions must be sought to these and other impediments because girl-child education is a must, if the nation is to make any appreciable progress.

Education of females has a profound effect on national development as lack of their education has been linked to low birth weight, poor health and high mortality rates in children, high fertility rates, poor family nutrition, low life expectancy, poor sanitation and high illiterate rates. The socio-economic importance of female education can, thus, not be over emphasized. Consequently, efforts to boost female education have been made by governments, international organizations and NGOs. However, there is still a gender disparity in education (Oke, 2000) Oladosu (2007) demonstrated that females still have low access to education, low participation and poor performance in many subjects, especially Mathematics and Science subjects. Many factors which are home, community and school based, continued to restrict developments in female education (Uruemu, 2012).

Hence, research has shown that, factors within the classroom are not the only causes of gender imbalances in education and that home based factors which include family size, household income, parents' education, cultural and traditional beliefs all contribute substantially to poor female enrolment in school. Girls are pulled out of school and boys left in school when the family income dictates that, all children cannot be educated. Girls miss school when there are chores to be done at home or there is a sick family member to nurse. Girls are taken out of school when they mature to prepare them for marriage or to help supplement the family income by selling, farming or performing other money earning

activities (Acato 2006). The African Girls Education Initiative AGEI (2001), in Korode (2008), admitted that, there is apathetic low enrolment of girls in school. To them, the following could be reason for low enrolment of female-children in schools especially primary school.

- i. Poor conceptualization of the status and occupation of the women and girls by the societies. The report argues that in some cultures, the female-child only plays subordinate roles to those of the male child and is sent to school if it was convenient for parents to bear the cost. The male child is given preferential treatment because of the notion that, he will grow up to maintain the family identity. This trend, the report observes, has inevitably led to the low enrolment of girls in secondary schools and their high drop-out rate.
- ii. The attitude of the society to female education and occupational choice. The report opines that, the society, as it is today, is a male dominated one and preferences, choices and decisions are made in such a way that, they favour the male gender. This attitude naturally determines the type of education women and girls are allowed to pursue.
- iii. Early marriage and unplanned pregnancies among girls have caused low female enrolment in secondary schools more especially in the Northern part of Nigeria where Islam permits girls to be married out early in life.
- iv. The school organizational pattern and location also constitutes some little factors. The report explains that, in most schools, existing school set-up, instructional materials and other educational activities re-enforce the inequalities between the

male and female child. Co-curricular activities in schools are more or less male dominated in nature and make no provision for the peculiar academic needs of the female child. By implication, therefore, the functioning of the school tends to portray male superiority and domination.

Acato, (2006) pointed out that, the factors which interplay and affect female education are limitless. Extra-curricular and out of school factors play a big role in female education. Long distances from school, sexual harassment by classmates, teachers and males in the community and inefficient use of her time contribute to making attendance in school poor. Finally, the girl child drops out of school when conditions at home, in school, on the way to school and in the community prevent her from having a meaningful and conducive learning environment.

Conclusion

Nigeria, a developing country is being confronted with economic, social, political and educational challenges. The challenges led to the introduction of different reforms at different levels of the national operation. The reforms were designed to bring about developments in areas of needs through infusion of modern methods and values. Specifically, education constitutes a major focus because it is believed that, education is an instrument of national development. Thus, it could be employed to achieve political, economic and social developments. The development of any nation requires the collective efforts of its citizens and all residents. More importantly, to achieve national development, both male and female members of the society need to be carried along (Alumode, 2000). The World Conference on Education for All, (EFA)

held in Geneva in 1990 stressed the need for gender equity in education. The Beijing Conference of 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) of 2005 also emphasized gender equity. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) also acknowledges the need to equalize educational opportunities between girls and boys. Gender equity is a major issue in the on-going reform programs embarked upon by the Federal Government of Nigeria and it is designed to address gender imbalance in education. This is because girls' access to basic education, especially in the rural areas of Nigeria has remained low (UNICEF, 2007). From the above literatures, it is true that, the girl-child faces a lot of challenges of education ranging from early marriage and teenage pregnancy, poverty level of parents, parents and girl's attitude to education, cultural and religious beliefs, learning environments and distance of schools etc. All these challenges and even more hinder the education of the girl-child.

Recommendations

If education must serve the society, it must produce people who carry much more than certificates. It must produce people, both normal and exceptional ones, with the right types of knowledge, ability and attitude to put them to work for the good of the society. Based on the major findings of this study, it is, therefore, imperative that, in order to improve the educational base of the girl-child and by extension her socio-political and economic status, government, community leaders, parents, professional guidance, counselors and other stakeholders should take cognizance of the following recommendations:

1. There is a need for government and other relevant stakeholders to organize more campaigns and awareness on the importance of girl-child education, and also emphasize

the negative outcomes of not educating the girl-child. Programmes that promote girl-child education should be promoted in all our communities. Each educated individual should spread the message of the girl-child education and raise awareness on these issues. The people must be sensitized to the community and social benefits of educating girls. This will help to disabuse the minds of parents, girls and the society on the non-challant attitude they have towards girl-child education.

2. Government and other stakeholders should strive to create conducive enabling sociopolitical and economic conditions which will discourage societal preference for male children and the traditional belief that the position of the girl-child and women is in the kitchen.
3. The girl-child needs to be provided with a safe and supportive educational environment, free from abuse, with separate toilet facilities, safe drinking water, equal attention with boys and a gender sensitive curriculum. The school curriculum also needs to be revisited, to ensure gender and cultural sensitivity and to include life skills and HIV/AIDS education.
4. More schools need to be built especially secondary schools in rural areas so as to avoid distant trekking to attend classes by students. And these schools should be equipped with the necessary facilities. There should also be more girl boarding schools so that parents who do not like mixed schools can send their girls to school.
5. Parents should be given opportunities for income generating

activities by both the various governmental agencies and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) to make funds available for the education of the girl-child.

6. Gender balanced curriculum and education policies should be established to consider the interest of the girl-child so that she is motivated to learn and also teacher's welfare should be considered.
7. Government must pass legislation that makes the education of girls mandatory for primary school, and then enforce these laws stringently, especially, in the rural communities so that the issue of house chores and hawking practices that hinder the education of the girl-child can be stopped.
8. Government needs to pass laws banning the early marriage practices that keep girls out of school until the girl-child has attained a certain level of education.

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