

An Assessment of Factors Militating against Girl Child Education in Nigeria

Okorie Mercy

Department of Computer Science, Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Nigeria

Abstract Children arrive at birth as packaged gifts with great but latent potentials. Training (especially formal education) nurtures, prepares and matures them to unleash these to humanity in service and live a fulfilled life; girl child is not left out but girl children, in Nigeria, do not have the same opportunity as boys. This paper, therefore, intends to investigate the Challenging Factors Militating against Girl Child Education in Nigeria. The factors include poor family background, religious isolation, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-driven violence, cultural discrimination and attitudes against women's status and role. Legislative and legal provisions have been recommended to alleviate the obstacles and enhance the girl child's right to partake in, and gain the dividends of education. Formal education is very essential in developing the value systems of girl children which would lead to the development of good families, good society and ultimately good nation. Hence the slogan: if you educate a boy, you educate an individual but if you educate a girl, you educate a nation.

Keywords Girl Child, Education, Challenging Factors

1. Introduction

Children arrive at birth as packaged gifts with great but latent potentials. Training (especially formal education) nurtures, prepares and matures them to unleash these to humanity in service and live a fulfilled life; Education at basic and post primary school is a fundamental right of every child as it unveils their great potentials, an essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom, empowerment and yields important development benefits. Education inculcates in the individual, knowledge, skills, character and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization (Asiegbu, Okorji & Bosah, 2014). According to Agbakwuru (2002) education equips one with marketable skills thereby lifting the possessor up from the poverty arena. Essentially Uzoma, (2013) mentioned that through education, the individual learns good health habits, principles and practices which promote healthy living and longevity as well as acquire marketable skills that confer economic power on the educated.

It is a veritable tool utilized by economically and socially marginalized adults and children in achieving freedom from poverty and participate fully as citizens (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

{UNESCO} 2017).

Decades ago, most African women received some sort of informal education, but formal education, has been reserved for men who occupy the more important and elite roles in government and society (Eliza, 2010). Women without formal education are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country and their world at large (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013).

Education of the girl child has been show to contribute immensely to the development of the family, the societies and the nation. Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, (2004) reported that child girl education contributes to the various aspects of their lives such as increased productivity, family health and nutrition, reduced fertility rates and related child mortality rates. Child girl education empower the girl child to become self -sufficient adult capable of taking decision and controlling her life. Jatau in Esomonu (1999) believes that the burden of nation building rests much on women. She goes on "we need women to create a blissful home, have well-educated and well-behaved children

The important of child girl education cannot be over emphasized. It is a global human right concern demanding legislation across the nations of the world as child girls are discriminated against. They are victims of various traditional and cultural practices, they suffer degradation, they are objects of poverty, their faces are only to be seen but their voices not to be heard, they are seen as being sub-servient to their male counterparts; they are the inferior set, their place is in the kitchen (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013).

* Corresponding author:

ebubecalvary@live.com (Okorie Mercy)

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Despite many gains recorded with regards to overall level of education worldwide and more children than ever are now attending primary school (King, 2013), there is still not world-wide gender parity in education. Girl child access to formal education has continued to be low in developing part of the world especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Globally, two thirds of all those who have no access to education are girls and women. Sixty-five million girls and women never even started school, and an estimated 100 million do not complete primary education, often because the quality is poor and their opportunities are far from equal to those of boys (Iwalaiye, Abah, Johnson & Giwa & Ali, 2016). In a recent by World Development (2012) there exist a sizeable gender gaps for poor women and women in poor places. The report revealed that in education where gaps have narrowed in most countries, girls' enrollment in primary and secondary schools in sub-Saharan African countries and some parts of south Asia have not improved much (Anah, 2013). In Nigeria, particularly, the north part of the country, access to basic education among the child girl have remain low. As only 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school (Unicef, 2007). Considering the vital role played by women in the society and the nation, it is therefore paramount to review the challenging factors militating against girl child education in Nigeria.

2. Child Girl Education in Nigeria

Over two decades, scholars from various field of study have carried out studies and reviews relating to child girl education. Various proposition has been made and agreed upon. Girl child education programme has been viewed by different people interested in the programme in different ways. For instance, the ministry of education is likely to see it as the formal school programme for all girls in school to ensure they obtain the best learning experience. Those from the non-formal sector see it as an educational programme designed for out of school girls to help them make up their missed chance of schooling. Some see it as a programme aimed at giving out of school girls vocational skills to help them break through economically (Abdulkarim & Mamman, 2014). Girl-child education is the process through which the girl-child is made functional members of her society (Iwalaiye, Abah, Johnson, Giwa & Ali, 2016). It is a process through which the girl-child acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to her and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society education connotes acquisition of something good, something worthwhile (Ocho, 2005).

At every educational level, women have been recognized to perform well despite challenges. Schacter (2010) argued that children's intelligence could be significantly influenced by environmental changes and that early childhood was a key to improving later performances in various aspects of the

individual's life. In view of this, Stronquist (2000) maintain that Girl-child education involves equipping girls who later grow up to women with the knowledge, abilities and mental powers with which they will be useful to themselves, the family and the society. Women education helps women take advantage of opportunities that could benefit them and their families, preparing women for the labor force and helping them understand their legal as well as their reproductive rights. Basic education provides girls and women with an understanding of basic health, nutrition and family planning, giving their choices and the power to decide over their own lives and bodies (Uzoma, 2013).

In recognition of the central position of education in the overall development of the individual and the society Asiegbu, Okorji and Bosah (2015) mentioned that Nigeria as a nation bases her philosophy of education on "the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary level both inside and outside the formal school system. Girl-child education in Nigeria remained at the fore front of gender studies for a very long time due to disparities observed in the number of girls in comparison to their male counterparts in schools at the primary and secondary levels. Abdulkarim and Mamman (2014) noted that, as a result of these observed disparities, programs aimed at availing the girl-child and her male counterpart of the opportunities for self-actualization and becoming useful members of the society through education were initiated by various governments of the federation. In this regard both Federal and State governments in Nigeria make policies, which enables or encourage people to be educated irrespective of their gender or ethnic background.

Also, the Nation constitution (1999), emphasis the right for education of all its citizens, regardless of tribe, sex, physical disability or whatsoever. All these show that the people of Nigeria consider Education as instrument par excellence for realizing rapid national development, for reaching social change, and for forging together a nation split by civil war (Csapo, 1981). Similarly, 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. In addition, Jomtien (1990) advocates for the removal of disparities of the poor, street kids, working children, rural and remote populations, indigenous people, ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities, should not suffer any discrimination in cases of accessing education.

Girl-child education is not easy to come by as it is usually proclaimed as many impediments stand in the way of the girl-child (Kasomo, 2009). The rights of the girl-children are always being denied and this denial leads to lack of access to education thus results in child labor, which deprives the girl-child of her childhood potentials, dignity and joy. This agrees with Bolaji (2007) who noted that there is still gender inequality in terms of accessibility to education in many parts of Nigeria particularly the Northern States like Katsina, Kano, Bauchi, and Jigawa, Akwa Ibom etc. Subsequent to

Bolaji (2007), 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. The resultant effect of such discrimination is poverty and the only key to ending poverty among women-folk, as a whole is education of the girl-child (Kasomo, 2009). According to Ahmad and Najeemah (2013) one of the most important tools available to empower women within the family and within society is education as it contains a cascade of benefits.

3. Benefits of Child Girl Education

The benefit associated with girl child education remains vital in terms of her options and resources over her life time. According to UNICEF, (2004) the benefits extend beyond the girl in affecting her family and the society as a whole, the benefits to society include enhanced economic development, education for the next generation, healthier young girls and families and fewer maternal deaths. Uzoma (2013) opined that women's education leads directly to better reproductive health, improved family health, economic growth, for the family and for society, as well as lower rates of child mortality and malnutrition. Women with better education show improved family life, as they tend to have smaller families and better reproductive health planning information and services in achieving desired family size. Eliza (2012) thus increase women education influences the level of fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality, family planning as well as improved health.

In the words of Kobani and Nkpolu (2014) a woman's literacy also increases productivity and self-employment in the informal sector. Kobani and Nkpolu (2014) cited that the educational level of rural women is linked to increased productivity in agricultural sector in many developing countries. He argues that literacy assists people to acquire skills and knowledge that help to facilitate better use of natural resources and other agricultural inputs, hereby increasing their productivity. Thus, girl-child being active participants in all stages of the productive chain, such as hoeing, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and threshing of grains, storage and distribution of goods need to be educated to increase productivity and their incomes. According to Stronquist (2000) politically, the girl-child is relegated to the background in the society. They are in most cases under-represented in the decision making process because of the notion that, a woman's place is in the kitchen. The problems also compounded by the girl-child's deficiency in educational qualification.

According to Alele (1986), the benefits derivable from women education includes; enhancement of the quality of living-food, housing, health, clothing, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. If the vast majority of our women are educated, their personal development can be enhanced remarkably, and their children and husbands also stand to gain tremendously. In all

communities, the education of parents, especially mothers, is one of the most effective ways of helping young children (McCrary & Royer, 2006).

Enemuo (1999) pointed out that education helps in the fulfillment of women's obligation. The benefit of education for a girl and society can be explained by the effect that education has on empowering girls to acquire and use new personal, social and economic behavior that in turn, affect societal change (Moulton, 1997). Ayodo (2010) observes that the quest for the provision of quality education continues to be a matter of leading concern to both consumers and providers of the education service in Kenya and other developing countries due to its relevance in advancing the contribution of the girl child.

According to Ottaway (2000), the girl-child's education has an effect on the economic well-being of a country. Girl child with basic education could easily gain employment in the formal labour force and therefore contribute not only to her family income but the National GDP. When girls are gainfully employed, they provide financial support to their families especially during economic recession hence an educated woman with a good earning power can help reduce the financial problems of the family and thus avert frustration and other financial problems.

4. Factors Militating against Child Girl Education

Girl-child education as a global concern has been shown to be a Herculean task that is not easily achievable as usually proclaimed due to many impediments which stand in the way of the girl-child. According to ILO (2009) over Jane Butigah Atayi (2008) observed that Parents' demand for the education of their daughters is low, reflecting both cultural norms and girls' work in and around the home. In addition, the cultural perceptions of girls as child minders, marriage material and a burden to the family influences their educational attainment in the contemporary society. Also some parents decided in many cultures that, education is not worthwhile for their daughters who will move into their husbands' families when they marry and that the gains in productivity or income due to education will accrue to the families of the sons-in-law rather than to them. Prominent among these factors militating against girl child education are poverty, parental influence, early marriage, cultural practices, and religion.

Poverty has remained a serious enemy of girl child education. Driscoll and Nagel, (2010) asserted that parents struggling to raise a child, often see poverty as adding extensive stress to the family hence many girls who should have been withdrawn to work for money. This sometime results to child labour. Available study indicates that rightly or wrongly impoverished parents often feel they need their girl-child's labor for additional income, just to help with the grueling requirements of life (Sperling 2005; in Onyeike, & Angela, 2011). In some parts of Nigeria, it is a

known fact that the input of the girl child into the family income is so high that it becomes economically unwise to allow such a child to go to school. Examples of such inputs include generating income by way of hawking food items. The girl child also helps with the household chores and look after the younger ones which relieves the parents of employing paid house helps. This therefore reduces the financial burden on the family (Ballara, 2002).

Also, traditional cultural practices strongly mitigate girls' enrolment in educational system. Family with limited resources tend to place more priority on boy child education recognizing them as future heads of household. Meanwhile girls are enrolled, they often face many more barriers to learning than boys do. For example, given the paucity of adequate day-care centers throughout much of the developing world and high levels of women's participation in the informal and formal labor markets, it is not uncommon for young girls to have to bring younger siblings to school with them, disrupting not only their own studies but those of other children (Leach, 2003).

In addition, women and girls often spend significantly more time on household chores and caring duties, such as child-rearing or attending to the sick, than male counterparts. This obligation inevitably limits the time available for education and other activities. Another contributing factor influencing cultural traditions and practices of the parents on girl-child education is the initiation ceremonies which still mark the transition from childhood to adulthood among communities in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013). UNESCO, et al, (2002) report shows that traditionally initiated girls may also feel it difficult to continue schooling after passage to adult hood as the next step is expected to be marriage.

Another Commonly cited factor militating against girl child education is early marriage which conflicts with educational programmes. Bolaji (2007) noted that early marriage has been institutionalized in many parts of Nigeria especially in Kano, Kastina, Sokoto, Bauchi and Kaduna. He further said that early marriage used to be the case among the Ibos, Ibibios and Urhobos, but with Western education, the practice has abated but not completely eradicated. Girls are given out in marriage for many reasons. On the other hand, once girls gain access to schools, however, they may experience both direct physical threats and subtler assaults on their confidence, self-esteem and identity (Pigozzi, 2002 in Onyeike & Angela, 2011).

The journey to school may be unsafe, since many girls experience harassment and physical attacks either on public transpiration in urban areas or remote part in rural areas. In some cases, extreme physical assault, including rape may be perpetuated against girls. Moreover, studies have revealed that on average, girls are likely to have far less time available after school to study. They typically have to assume a multitude of household chores including cooking, cleaning and even serving as a principal caregiver for younger siblings—responsibilities that boys are virtually never expected to assume (Ward, & Penny, 2003).

A study in the southern part of Adamawa state revealed that fathers are deliberately not allowing their daughters to go to school because they consider investment in female education as unprofitable, since the girls are likely to end up in another man's home (Abubakar, 2003). Parental influence has been identified as an important factor affecting girl student' academic achievement; parents' education and encouragement are strongly related to improved student achievement (Wang, Wildman & Colbourn 1996). Parental education and social economic status have an influence on student. achievement. Students with parents who were both college – educated tended to achieve at the highest levels. Children whose parents are of high educational status have a better statistical chance of participating in secondary Education (Oloo, 2003). Important factors include parental involvement in their children education, how much Television children are allowed to watch and how often students change schools (Hammer, 2003).

Religion can be seen as a contributing factor to the inequalities between men factor to the inequalities between men and women. Rhlich (1975), emphasized that the institution of Pudah, symbolized by the veil alienates Muslim women from the public eyes and reduces them to complete subordination. Clocough and Lawin in Awoniyi (2001) said Islam has been associated with low participation of female in schools. There is that wrong notion of imposition of Western formal education for the purpose of converting people to Christianity. For these reason Islamic communities opposes formal education especially for the female for fear that western education promote value contrary to cultural norms. Abbasi (2009) in his paper on Women and Education in Islam admitted that religion particularly is cited as a major stumbling block for women's advancement. Similarly, Norton and Tomal (2009) reported that religion adversely.

Another contributing factor influencing cultural traditions and practices of the parents on girl-child education is the initiation ceremonies which still mark the transition from childhood to adulthood among communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Evidently lot of confusion and dilemmas faced by girl-children were created by attending ceremonies more especially when the schedules of such ceremonies overlap with the school calendar and that leads to absenteeism and dropouts. Although, communities accept the girls as adults, teachers or schools continue to consider them as children. Sometimes they may be punished for not participating in some activities which adults do not normally participate in.

Traditionally, initiated girls may also feel it difficult to continue schooling after passage to adult hood as the next step is expected to be marriage (UNESCO, et al, 2002). Among the other cultural constrains on girl-child education that creates similar dilemmas to those who pass-through initiation ceremonies are Circumcision. Normally Circumcised girl- children become negative influences on their uncircumcised peers and perceive themselves as adults and as a result of this become rude to teachers and often reject schools as institutions for "children" by exhibiting

abnormal behaviors of frequent absenteeism and reduced performance which leads them to drop out from schools and eventually to marry (Ghaghara, 1993).

Njau and Wamahiu, (1998) established a relationship between. Girl-child pregnancy and the incidence of dropout throughout Africa, these pregnancies end the schooling of girl-child both though self-withdrawal and national pregnancy policies that ensures the expulsion of girl children from the education system with little or no chance of re-entry. Najau and Wamahiu (1998) argue that it is the societal responses to pregnancy rather than pregnancy per se that push girl-children out of school and hamper their opportunities for educational and career development. Odaga and Heneveld (1995) indicate that fear of pregnancy is another factor for parents inspiring parents to remove their children from schools. The health implications of teenage pregnancy are another reason for early dropouts. A study in Kenya showed that female students from secondary school who had been pregnant were twice as likely to report poor health as those with no pregnancy history (Yomi, 1993).

5. Conclusions

Education in any normal society is accepted as an instrument to power, prestige, survival, greatness and advancement for men and women. It is implicitly a part of culture as it is a life-long learning process that enables a person, irrespective of age; understand the relationship between the environment and his or her peculiar circumstances. It helps towards the development of a complete balanced and rational personality. Girl child education remain a veritable too in nation development thus development of any society would be grossly lopsided if the girl child is not given quality education. Improving access to and the quality of education is the most rewarding investment a country can make. Investing in female education will accelerate Nigeria's economic and social development by enhancing human capital, slowing population growth, and alleviating poverty. Consequently, the lack of education will have negative influences on the individual, family and society at large. The inequality in the Nigerian society inevitably impact on the provision and content of education, as well as on the ability of girls to enter, and remain in school. The paper concludes that the forces which combine to hamper women education, family stability and sustainable development in Nigeria could be viewed broadly to include denial of equitable access to and participation to functional education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on women, discrimination and harassment and exposure to cruel mourning rites and transitions.

6. Recommendations

Based on the reviewed literature, the followings are

recommended

- Intensive efforts to foster a gender inclusive culture from the family level through education, across the board up to higher education, in order to promote sustainable human development need to be vigorously pursued by governmental and non-governmental organizations.
- An enforcement of available legislation on principle of gender equality in education should be adhered vigorously to ensure a greater percentage of the girl child are being enrolled into the educational system.
- The issue of girl child education must be taken very serious by both parents and the government by banning street hawking among school girls, discouraging early marriage, and forced labour.

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