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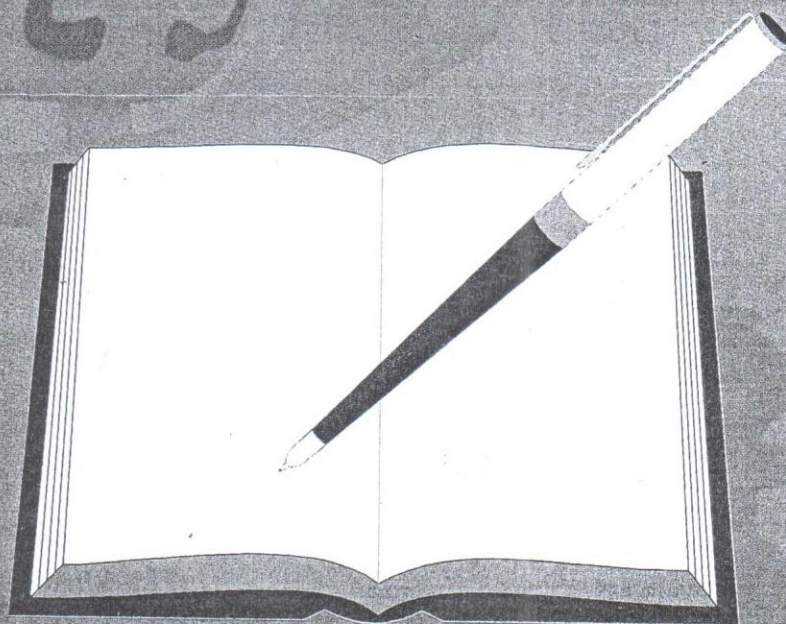
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Counselling, and the Girl-Child Education

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental human right that should be given to all citizens irrespective of gender. Education is essential to prepare the girl child for healthy, safe and productive transition to adulthood. Creating access to education for a girl child is one of the most powerful ways of fighting poverty. However, girl child education has suffered a lot of neglect in Nigeria. The problem of girl child education may emanate from the level of poverty in the country, culture and beliefs, early marriage and others.

Improving girl-child education has become important if meaningful development is to take place in the country. Therefore, counselling is needed to improve participation of girl child in education. Suggestions were made that Government must create an enabling environment to facilitate participation of girl child in all spheres of the society. Counsellors should create awareness through public enlightments, seminars, and workshops on the benefits of educating the girl child so as to enable her contribute immensely to the society and national development.

Introduction

In every cultural setting, there exist basic norms and beliefs that guide the people in the area. In Nigeria for instance, it is believed that girl-child would leave her father's house and marry thereby, taking all her father's glory and investment with her to benefit other families. Many people are not aware that the type of education available to a girl-child in Nigeria determines to a large extent the economic growth of Nigerian families and the country at large. It is worthy of note that what a girl-child would become in future is dependent on the kind and type of training she receives at present. It is obvious that girls of today would be mothers of tomorrow. It is unfortunate that in many areas in Nigeria, women are still deprived of many rights such as participation in politics, holding key posts and controlling affairs; this is as a result of low education (Oniye, 2008). Education is central to the development and improvement of any nation. It empowers the people and strengthens the nation. Education in a normal society is regarded as an instrument of power, prestige, survival, greatness and advancement for men and women (Doreen, 2014). In the opinion of Osinulu (1994), education is the process of providing information for an inexperienced person to help the individual to develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and emotionally. Fafunwa (1974) views education as the

aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other form of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Moreover, education is a human right that should be given to all human beings. It is an important asset for every child whether boy or girl. Education enables a girl-child to decide the kind of life she wishes to live. It provides the girl-child the skills, information and self-confidence needed to be a better person, parent, worker and citizen.

Education is the right of every girl child and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potentials and to play a productive and equal role in the family, the society, the country and the world. The best legacy to be given to a child is to have a peaceful, enlightened, knowledgeable and socially stable life in order to achieve growth and development. The only way to achieve this is through having a sound builder of the society and the builder of the society is a girl-child, the future mother.

A girl child is a young female person who is from birth to eighteen years of age, who would eventually grow into a woman and finally get married. A girl child would become a married woman who would look after the young ones, take care of the family; hence, the family becomes large and turns into a society. Girl children tend to be more sensitive to issues of affiliation, inclusion, loneliness and acceptance. They have greater tenderness, understanding and better control of emotions. Girl children are hardworking, dependable and obedient and when given the chance, are accountable in handling positions of trust. Their role in the survival and continuity of any society is certainly not under contention. It is worrisome that despite the acknowledged roles that women play in nation building and development; societies like Nigeria still continued to treat girl children as second class citizens (Nduka-Ozo, 2013). Girl-child education refers to educational programme which provides ample opportunities for girls to enroll, attend and complete their education without any sense of discrimination (Ishaq & Ali, 2014). Girl-child education encompasses the necessary attitude, cultural and behavioural training given to girls to enable them become useful, resourceful and respectful citizens of their country (Nwakego, 2014).

Factors militating against the girl-child education

Education is regarded as a means for the individual and society to grow. Education is a human right that should be given to all citizens. It is in the recognition of its importance that is regarded as a fundamental human right. The national policy on education (FGN, 2004) in its documents expresses the commitment of the federal government of Nigeria to providing education for all children. Part of the main aims and objectives of Nigeria's education policy is the inculcation of the right type of value and attitudes for the survival of the individuals and the Nigeria society. In contrary, the enrolment of girls in schools is not laudable. It was in view of this that the Girls' Education Project (GEP), a joint initiative project between the Federal Government of Nigeria, DFID and UNICEF was established to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. According to UNICEF, Nigeria has 10.5 million children out of school of which 60 percent of these children are girls.

Ugwu (2001) asserted that girl child neglect includes all acts of omission or denial of the basic rights and needs of the girl child, which impairs her well-being. This involves the absence of genuine efforts to create conditions that will enable the girl child to develop maximally. According to Ugwu, girl child neglect is also seen as all intentional acts that hamper the physical, emotional, moral, social, educational, economic and political development of a girl child such as battering, starvation, food poisoning, mutilation, rape, suppression and circumcision which result in female genital mutilation. This is indeed pathetic to the women folk.

Furthermore, it is observed that some communities discriminate against the education of the girl-child. Their education has suffered great challenges particularly in the northern part of Nigeria. United Nation International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF, 2005) reported that the proportion of girls to boys in schools range from 1 girl to 2 boys or 1 to 3 in some states. The Nation School Census (NSC) (2006) as reported by UNICEF (2007) revealed a net enrolment ratio of 80.6%, suggesting that substantial proportion (19%) of the primary school age population between 6-11 years are not enrolled in primary schools nationwide. This represents about 5 million Nigerian children between 6-11 years old that do not receive primary education. Some of the factors that may hinder the education of a girl child are:

Negative thoughts and notions: Some parents have negative notions and opinions about girl-children education. These parents and guardians believe that the place of girl-children is in the kitchen, they are objects of poverty because parents feel they are of no economic value to the family since they will someday get married and will not project the name of the family. Parents and guardians believe that girl-children are inferior to boys and that is why boys do go to school more than girls. It is also a general notion that girl-children should not be seen nor heard but kept at home.

Poverty in the country: The low socio-economic situation in the country has prompted some parents to withdraw their girl-child from school (Amadi, 2013). They are removed from school to be engaged in economic activities like street hawking; they are given out as house helps to work throughout the day and bring money home to the family.

Traditional and cultural beliefs: Some cultures never encourage girl-child education, thus, girl-child is neglected tremendously (Amadi, 2013). In addition, the widespread operation of customary early marriage whereby young girl would be compelled to marry according to the prevailing traditions and culture which therefore make the girl's rights restricted and remained a property to be owned by her husband. This situation is rampant in the Northern part of Nigeria whereby the culture compels the girl child to marry at an early age particularly after primary school which does not give the girl children opportunity to acquire higher education.

Ignorance of the parent: As a result of low or lack of education, many parents to see education as something not worthy to earn; western education is seen as a way of negative transformation and initiation into materialism and promiscuity of girl child; hence they greatly discouraged the girl child from receiving western education.

Other factors affecting girl child education in Nigeria are lack of funds, inadequate facilities, inadequate manpower, sexual harassment, conflicting societal role expectations and lack of political will to implement the educational programme

(Oniye, 2008). In addition, the Department for International Development, DFID (2005) also highlighted cost of education, poor school environments, weak position of women in the society, conflict and social exclusion as challenges that make it difficult for girls to access education.

Importance of Educating the girl-child

The importance of educating a girl-child cannot be overemphasized. It is a fact that when a girl is educated, a nation is educated. This is so because educating the girl child produce a mother who is educated and would in turn educate her children, care for the family and produces a society. The mother is the first teacher of the child; she needs to be versed in knowledge and skills to inculcate better value system in the child. Educating the girl child translates to better health for future generation; improving education of a girl-child has a powerful influence on both mortality and fertility. According to DFID (2005), educating girls help to make societies healthier, wealthier and safer; it helps to reduce child deaths, improve maternal health and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Education increases a girl's level of health and health awareness; she can read and interpret facts about herself and things around her. Girls with education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices, less likely to become pregnant at a very early age and are more likely to seek antenatal care, postnatal care and prompt attendance at delivery (Nmadu, etal, 2010.)

Provision of education for a girl-child would open up new dreams and better future for her. When a girl-child is given the opportunity to go to school, she would not be exploited, she would no longer have to work for others, she will discover herself and potentialities, thus acquire self-esteem and confidence. It is worthy of note that education gives a good means of livelihood and sustenance to girl children; it gives support for their economic role and development. Since one's level of education to an extent determines ones income and capacity, it is expedient therefore, that girls get educated for better contribution to their families, society and world over.

Strategies for improving girl child education

There are some strategies that can be implemented to increase and improve school attendance and completion by girls. These strategies help to ensure effective learning in safe, gender-sensitive and child-centered environments. The United Nations Children's fund UNICEF (2004) highlighted the strategies that can be implemented to eliminate gender disparity in education:

Making education free and compulsory: Removing fees or offering financial support to families with daughters in school as well as explaining the advantages of sending girls to school can make a real difference.

Recruitment of women teachers: Those who can serve as role models for girls and may make girls' parents feel more comfortable to leave their girls in their care. More female teachers should be recruited to teach and counsel. Female role models should be mentioned to motivate the girl child to want to be like prominent women in the society.

Promoting sports in schools: Providing girls with access to sport can help to achieve

gender parity in education. Through sports, girls are given the chance to be leaders and improve their confidence and self-esteem. As girls participate in sports, it helps to acquire new interpersonal skills, gain access to different opportunities and gives them ample opportunities in school and community life.

Teaching in the local language: when the language of instruction is different from the children's mother tongue, it is often more disabling for girls, who tend to be less exposed to social environments beyond their immediate families. Instructions in the mother-tongue language can increase access to school, leading to higher attendance and help facilitate learning. The provisions in the National Policy Of Education should therefore be implemented.

Enabling young mothers to return to school: Girls who become pregnant at a tender age should be encouraged to return to their studies. The atmosphere should be made friendly for them to reduce perceived stigma and bullying from their peers. States and local governments can make this to be realistic and effective by establishing one of such school at local government level.

Taking special measures to reach the most disadvantaged girls: Girls living in rural areas face discrimination and exclusion; this should be highly discouraged by making education reach them through specially designed programmes such as locating schools closer to homes as girls are less likely to be able to make a long journey from school to home; and to ensure the adequate security of the girl-children.

Supplying safe water and latrines: Many girls drop out of school at the onset of menstruation, partly because there are no separate toilet facilities for them. Effort should be put in place to build more toilets as it is a very essential facility in the school. Water should always be made available to ensure comfort of the girl-children.

Counselling and Girl-child Education

Counselling refers to a series of assistance rendered by a professional counsellor to guide against or solve a particular problem. Counselling is a helping relationship in which someone who has problem gets help from a professionally trained personnel who has the necessary skills, knowledge and experience in problem solving. The issue of girl-child education in Nigeria has become worrisome; therefore counsellors must take into consideration the following initiative to encourage more girls to attend school.

1. Awareness must be created on the rights of women to be educated and the right to function in public sectors. Counsellors must advocate that women have equal right as men in the society and they should be given equal opportunity.
2. Enlightenment programme should be organized for parents to revisit and reconsider the issues of educating the girl-child. Parents should be persuaded to remove the stigmatization spell on girls and allow them to go to school. This can be done by speaking to parents during the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, radio and television programmes. Town hall meetings can also be initiated to address parents on such.
3. Counsellors should promote the attributes and strengths of women especially her resourcefulness. Such attributes would promote women's chances of attaining self-actualization in the development process.

4. Public enlightenment should be done to let the populace know that domestic responsibilities are not for girls alone, boys should be encouraged for their own personal benefit in future; it should be jointly done by both genders.
5. Counsellors should participate in planning quality basic education to allow gender equitable education to be possible for all across the nation.

In addition, Yahaya (1999) suggested methods to be adopted by counsellors to improve participation of girl child in education:

Cognitive Restructuring: This is the process of changing inaccurate and negative thoughts that are attributed to girl child education. The counsellor can use this technique to assist parents to change their thoughts and feelings about educating a girl child. The negative feelings could be changed to positive ones.

Assertiveness Training: This is essential to help the girl child differentiate between submissive, aggressive and assertive style of communication. It is necessary for the girl child so as not to ignore or be deprived of her right and also not to display characteristics which can alienate parents or guardians. Yahaya (1999) opined that assertiveness training could be helpful to girls who are denied their right, prevented from having access to education. The process involves counsellors teaching the girl child useful skills to develop self-confidence and seek for her right without being aggressive.

Guidance Services: Guidance services through group and individual counselling should be provided. Provision of information services should be made available to female children in the community so as to be aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Organization of Seminars: Workshops, seminars, symposia, career talks, skills acquisition and development programmes should be organized by the counsellor to sensitize and empower the parents and guardians. These would give them insight into providing adequate education for their children irrespective of gender.

Conclusion

Counselling is known to give support to clients to find solutions to certain challenges. Counselling also helps individuals maximize their potentials to the fullest. Girls are well endowed beings; their potentials should not be allowed to waste away. All hands must be on deck to ensure that girl-child receive adequate and proper education to make Nigeria great.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned discussions, the following suggestions are hereby given:

1. Regular awareness programmes should be organized for girl children to allow them realize the need and importance of being educated; since sometimes, the girls themselves are not aware of the reasons of being educated.
2. Functional Adult Education Centers should be established in all nooks and crannies in Nigeria to educate girls who drop out from school or do not have access to formal education due to one challenge or the other.

3. Professional Counsellors should also be employed and posted to educational centers to help facilitate learning and achievement rate of the girl children.
4. Participatory development strategy should be adopted so that girl children can contribute effectively to the satisfaction of themselves, their family and to contribute to the development of the society.
5. Government should create an enabling environment to facilitate participation of girl children in all sphere of the society political sector, inclusive.
6. Girl children should be ready for the task and see themselves as one who can achieve and can contribute to the development of the society. Girl children must be ready to face the difficulties associated to get educated.
7. Women who have excelled in their career should encourage the girl children to pursue education by sponsoring them, giving out scholarship, providing transportation facilities and giving words of encouragement.
8. Parents should change their minds over the notion that girl-child education is a waste of resources. Girl-child has the right to be educated and to contribute her quota to the development of the society.
9. The child right Act should be implemented and parents found wanting should be punished accordingly.

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