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GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION: IMPORTANT FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education helps one to maximize his or her physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful to him or her and the society. It is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enable him or her to function effectively as a member of the society. Education of the girl-child will enable her to live a healthier, happy life. It will assist her to develop skills, information and self-confidence, more productivity at work, better paid indeed and increase in her future earnings. Many reasons have been put forward for these imbalances in education of the girl-child, as a result of economic constraints, gender segregation, parents' education, parents' religion, family type, position of the girls in the family, ignorance and illiteracy of parents and some other cultural practices. In many countries, available indicators show that the girl-child is discriminated against from earlier stages of life through her childhood. In some parts of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reason for the discrepancy include among other things are religious and cultural practices, poverty, illiteracy and ignorance. Apart from all concrete efforts made by the United Nations Organization (UNO), Education For All (EFA) and United Nations Educational Scientific And Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) and Nigerian Government to establish a visible and purposeful direction geared towards enhancing access of Nigerian children to education and achieving improved retention and completion rates, there are still obstacles of socio-cultural factors of family type, religion and literacy level of parents in boys' and girls' educational development in the country. Girls are often treated as inferior and socialize to put themselves last, thus undermining their self-esteem. The girl-child should be encouraged to participate actively, effectively and equally with boys at all levels, socially, economically, culturally etc.

Keywords: importance, girl-child and education.

Introduction

Education is the cornerstone around which the development of a nation's political, socio-economic, and technology revolves. Education is a tool for eradicating all forms of social discrimination, deprivation, and also an instrument for attaining a united and peaceful society. Education is therefore the machine for social change, economic transformation and political advancement, most especially when it is designed and provided to take care of gender differences. Mahuta (2007) posited that schools are established as deliberate attempt by societies to teach social values to the younger generation, be it male or female.

In many traditional African societies, Nigeria inclusive, the education of the girl-child in the past decades was always taken to be informal (Fafunwa, 2002). Female children were educated under the auspices of their mothers, grandmothers, elder sisters or any other responsible female adults who could train the female children as housewives, mothers and equip them with all types of services related to home management (Tsoede, 1997, and Oluwale, 2002). Fafunwa stated further that Africans were not in favour of western education for the girl-child.

Consequently, the education of the girl-child is being interrupted because most parents believe that the benefit of the education will be enjoyed by their husbands alone, and that where the resources of training her are limited, the opportunity cost will come in. Thus, the boy will ultimately be considered. They also believe that instead of wasting their hard-earned money training a girl-child in school, it is better she is sent to an urban Centre to be employed as maid, thereby earning income for the family (Nzewunwa, 2003 and Jekayinfa, 2007). The parents believed that holding the girls at home would prepare them for marriage and life of being productive and supportive housewives (Shiru, 2000). Olomolaiye (1989) stated that some African parents believed that men need to pursue career throughout their life time while women should willingly allow their own careers to be interrupted by procreation and home responsibilities because of socio-cultural factors of family type, religion and literacy level. Margouki (2002) asserted that majority of men prefer to marry semi-literate or illiterate women who they believe have respect and manners for their husbands and parents. It is one thing to provide educational programmes for girls of school-age; it is another for the girls to have access to, retention in and completion rates of the educational programme for the stipulated time. This act of staying on in the educational programme is called retention. Retention means the ability to stay in school after enrolment irrespective of academic and socio-cultural factors (UBE, Act 2004 and FRN, 2007).

Global Perspective on Girl-Child Education

In spite of all concrete efforts made at increasing girl-child education in the areas of access, retention and completion rate by Nigerian government at all levels through several international policies such as Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goal (MDGs), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others like the United Nations (UN) policies that stipulate modalities for nations to embark on and to make education free, compulsory and universal for every citizen, there are still obstacles to the progress of girl-child education in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2004).

Education for sustainable development is fundamentally about values with respect at the center:

1. Respect for others, including those of present and future generation;
2. For differences and diversity;
3. For the environment; and
4. For the resources of the planet we inhabit.

In addition, education enables us to understand ourselves, others and our links with the wide national and social environment.

Along with a sense of justice, responsibility, exploration and dialogue, ESD aims to move us to adopting behaviours and practices which enable all to live a full life without being deprived of basic education. It is unlikely to inculcate values of this kind. Seventeen years after the Jomtien Conference, the Education-For-All (EFA), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Fast Track Initiative (FTI), World Bank, Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Universal Basic Education (UBE), Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and resolution by the UN, Nigeria could not boast of appreciable achievement of any of the goals. For example Azikwe (2006) pointed out after evaluating the UBE programmes in Enugu state, that every requirement for successful implementation of Universal Basic Education programme such as teachers, classrooms, toilets, desk, libraries, furniture, and so on was grossly inadequate.

Furthermore, pathetically, not one of the Educations for All goals has been achieved. For instance, MDGs Goal number four which states that all children, particularly girls, should have access to gender equality in school enrolment is still in favour of male sex, six years after the launching and implementation of the UBE programme. Thirteen years later, Ojo and Azikiwe (1994) compared environmental trends in schools and found out that there exists gender imbalance in education, in favour of boys and men. Despite these programmes and their goals, many Nigerian children of primary and junior secondary school age are still out of school.

The National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) (2002) observed that from the estimated population of 3.6 million children of basic education age, only two hundred and three thousand, eight hundred and forty-four are in school (NCNE, 2002). UNDP (2004) also reported that among the estimated twenty million children of school age, 15.5 per cent are not enrolled in any primary and junior secondary school while only around two-third of all Nigerian children are reaching completion rate at the end of primary six, as the percentage of enrolment into primary one is reported to be around 55 per cent (UNDP 2004, Abani 2004). Education alone is likely to inculcate values of this

kind. If that were the case, the world would already be much farther down the road towards the practices of sustainable development. Nevertheless, education constitutes the central pillar of strategies to promote such values. It has been discovered that all programmes by the Nigerian government, since the Jomtien Conference in Thailand has not made any meaningful impact on improving education of the girl-child in Nigeria.

In the global world, education is seen as the fulcrum for sustainable development and it is the cornerstone which enables quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country. The Nigeria's National Policy on Education (1984) posited that education is the highest investment that a nation can make for quick development in all ramifications. Having recognized education as "an instrument *per excellence* for effective national development" as well as "a dynamic instrument of change", it is also the basis for the full promotion and improvement of the status of women.

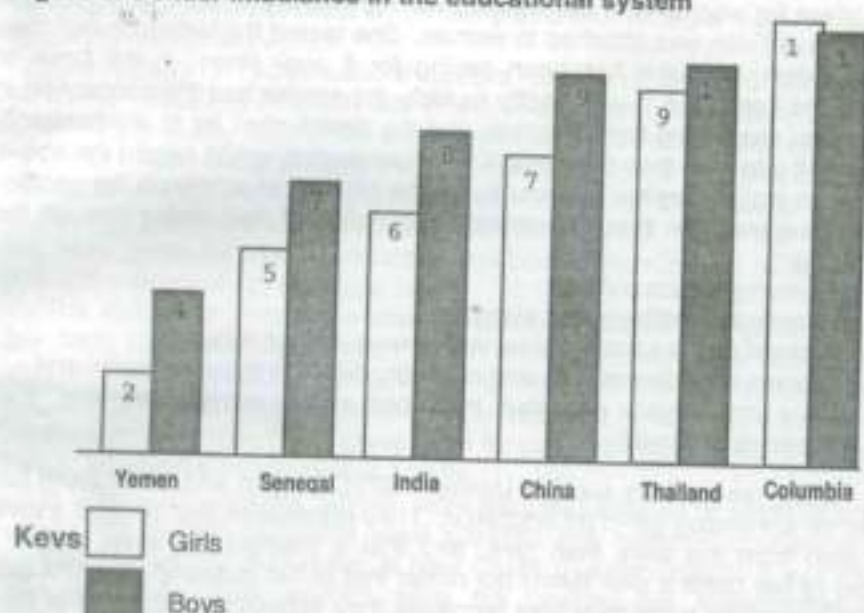
Education enables the girl-child to improve her standard of living and helps her to advance in different fields of human endeavour. Education is the basic tool that should be given to the girl-children in order to fulfill their role as full members of the society (Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, 1985). The education of the girl-child is a spring board to every other form of empowering her politically, economically and socially. The girl-child forms a great percentage of the population, and therefore, they are expected to contribute meaningfully to the welfare of the nation for both personal and collective development. In the real sense, women and girl-children are expected to acquire education to the peak. Unfortunately, a careful examination reveals that they are downtrodden.

Apart from all concrete efforts made by the Nigerian Government to establish a visible and purposeful direction geared towards enhancing access of Nigerian children to education and achieving improved retention and completion rates, there are still obstacles of socio-cultural factors of family type, religion and literacy level of parents in boys' and girls' educational development in the country. Statistics provided by the Federal Ministry of Education revealed that male children are ahead of female children in terms of access rate, retention rate, and the rate of completing basic education. More boys have access rate to retention rate in and completion rate of education than their female counterparts (Akueshi, 1994).

Reasons for Girl-Child Imbalance in Education

Many reasons have been put forward for these imbalances. For instance, girls are said to drop out of school because of socio-cultural factors of family type, religion and literacy level of parents and some other cultural practices such as early marriage (Agbonna, 2008).

Figure 1: Gender imbalance in the educational system



Source: World Bank Data Sheet 2006, Institute for Statistics www.uis.unesco.org

From the figure above, the black bar charts represent boys and the white ones represent the girls. In Yemen, the enrolment ratio is 21 girls to 45 boys; in Senegal, the enrolment ratio is 53 girls to 70 boys; in India, the enrolment ratio is 60 girls to 81 boys; in China, 75 girls are enrolled per 97 boys; in Thailand, a ratio of 94 girls are enrolled per 100 boys; in Colombia, a ratio of 110 girls are enrolled per 113 boys. From the World Bank (2006) Data sheet, Africa had a population of 305 million with total percentage of 35 million. In 2025, predictably, the population of the youths will be 424 million. Age 10-24 will be 32% of the population.

Many scholars have argued that religion has a lot to do with one's family size (Darling-Hamond, 2000 and Yusuf, 2008). Many of these family experiences could have impact on the quality and quantity of education the girl-child receives. One of the major problems in world education sector and in Nigeria in particular is the persistent low enrolment of girl-child in basic education. Moreover, enrolling girls in school does not guarantee that they will receive quality education or even graduate. It is an important first step and other indicators of educational attainment such as completion rates-currently not available for all countries should be gathered more systematically. For

thousands of years, according to Nwangi (2004), men have believed that the proper place for women is in the home. Even right from the Bible, original sin in the Garden of Eden was attached to women. She tasted the forbidden fruit that tempted Adam, and she has been paying for it ever since. In the book of Genesis, the Lord said: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow, thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (Genesis 3:16). Sociologists would regard the above quotation as a mythological justification for the position of women in the society. Many women may see it as an accurate description of their status throughout the ages, that is:

1. Women produce children;
2. Women are mothers and wives;
3. Women do the cooking, cleaning, sewing and washing;
4. Women take care of men and are subordinate to male authority; and
5. They are largely excluded from high-status occupations and high positions of power.

Many researchers such as Usman (1970), Akagun and Alao (2008) have worked on enhancing girl-child education. They discovered that parents expect more help from the boys than girls, and that a married girl is no longer a member of her father's own family but rather that of her husband. The few girls that are opportune to go to school terminate their schooling at the end of the lower basic school. To further buttress this point, Abani (2004) provided empirical evidence that suggested an almost total exclusion of females from upper and post basic education in Niger state. Less than 0.6% of over 25,000 students in junior secondary schools in Niger state by 2004/2005 were girls. Aina (2002) put the numbers of Nigerians without any formal education at 4 billion representing 49.3 per cent of the 1991 census population. Out of this number, 60.5 per cent are females while 39.5 per cent are males.

It is also revealed that there are socio-cultural factors of family headship, religion and parent's literacy level hinders Nupe girls from basic school to tertiary institutions. Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) in a study carried out in Lagos on constraints on women labour force participation found that both men and women indicated their preferences for man rather than woman as boss. This presupposes that a woman should recognize wifehood and motherhood as her great contribution to the society and should therefore remain at home. It is assumed that education will not allow women to take up their traditional duties and this must have contributed to their dropping out of school. Yolo (1993) remarked that disparity in access rate to education continues to exist in favour of male, while a corresponding high illiteracy rate persists among females in Nigeria. The female literacy rate in 1990-2004, as stated by Yolo (1993) was

estimated at about 44.5 per cent. When compared with 62.3 per cent for male, female literacy was relatively low.

The history of socio-cultural factors hindering girl-child imbalance access rate to education, retention rate in school and completion rate of western education can be traced back to the pre-independence Christian Missionary Era. During the era, most of the schools were predominantly boys. The schools were established to suit the traditional perception of Africans on the place of women in the society, prior to the colonial era (Fafunwa, 1974). Thus, the colonial masters were particular about producing able-bodied literate men to serve as servants and interpreters to the white men.

The first major step in the area of female education in Nigeria started with the 1969 Curriculum Conference which sought, among other things, the provision of equal access to education at all levels (Fafunwa, 2002). The conference culminated in the formation of the National Policy on Education in 1977, revised in 1982. The policy gives room for equal educational opportunities for all Nigerian citizens irrespective of gender.

In Britain, for example, women were excluded from all universities until 1871 when few female applicants were admitted into scientific courses at a newly created University of Durham, in New Castle (Render, 1980). It was also recorded that until 1948, women were not granted full membership of Cambridge University (Mckenzie, 2009). Today, however, in the developed world, a lot has changed in the attitude towards girl-child education.

Girl-Child Education and National Development

As stated in the national policy on education, the aim of the national development plan was to build a united, progressive and dynamic nation through education. The national development plan is as follows to develop:

1. a free and democratic society;
2. a just and egalitarian society;
3. a United Strong and self-reliant nation;
4. a great and dynamic economy; and
5. a land full of bright opportunities for all citizens (NCNE, 2002).

No society can achieve and maintain its continuity and stability without some level of homogeneity among her members.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and Girl-child Education

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) are a series of eight time-bound development goals that seek to address issues of poverty, education, gender equality, health, environment and the global development. All of these are to be achieved by the year 2015. They were agreed by the international

community at the United Nation's Millennium Summit, held in New York in September, 2000. Demonstrating Nigeria's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo launched the National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDS), a comprehensive socio-economic reform compact, which incorporates the Millennium Development Goals. He also created a presidential committee on the Millennium Development Goals that guides the nation, the achievement and Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (SSAP-MDGs). The office of the SSAP-MDGs functions as a secretariat to the presidential committee, and is responsible for establishing a Virtual Poverty Fund (VPF), which will house debt relief gains for Millennium Development Goals related expenditure.

The global concern for basic education was first announced and declared in an international conference on the global crisis in education held in Paris in 1968. It was recommended among other things that basic education should be taken seriously by the global world. Owing to this progress in international discussion for basic education, the significance of education as to why it is necessary to pursue it vigorously went on till the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) of 1990. This conference gave birth to the document entitled, "World Declaration on Education-for-All" as a framework of actions to meet basic learning needs (FGN/UNICEF, 2003). The conference also clarified for the world the full importance of basic education.

In September 2000 in New York, Nigeria was among the 189 countries that signed and adopted the Millennium Development Goals in the United Nations Millennium Summit. Nigeria Government committed herself and her entire citizenry to the responsibility of ensuring that the goals are achieved in Nigeria between then and 2015 by signing the declaration.

Nigeria has since then taken some concrete steps towards fulfilling these commitments. Some of the measures taken include the following:

The Federal Government through its agency, the national planning commission articulated and established the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), a national medium term development blue-print in 2004, which was reprinted in 2005 by the Central Bank of Nigeria. NEEDS is given birth to as Nigeria's home-grown medium-term development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (Okebukola, 2005).

The sociologists and anthropologists believe that there does not exist a society in which women do not have an inferior status to that of men. The attitude and this type of practices have relegated women to the background in the education, political and employment sectors.

Importance of Girl-Child Education

The sociologists and anthropologists believe that there does not exist a society in which women do not have an inferior status to that of men. This attitude and this type of practices have relegated women to the background in the education, political and employment sectors.

Women education is the process by which women acquire the knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society. If a woman is educated, she will be empowered. Okafor (2010) further viewed women empowerment as a process which enables women to develop their capacity to actualize their potentials.

The benefits derived from education include: enhancement of the quality of living, food, housing, health, cloth, transport, communication, entertainment and gainful use of leisure. If the vast majority of our women folks are educated, their personal development can be enhanced tremendously. Children and husband stand to gain remarkably. Education will enable the girl-child to have confidence in herself and her ability to contribute effectively to national and economic development.

For the world to benefit from adequate female education, Williams (2004) stated that the following objectives could help in designing a girl-child oriented education system that will yield functionally:

- i. Preparing the girl-child for her role of laying solid foundation for future generation and sustenance of our civilization;
- ii. Preparing them for their roles as tomorrow's mothers who are able to take better care of the nation's children for future socio-economic and political dispositions;
- iii. Enabling them contribute their talents and skills in the task of revival and survival of national economy;
- iv. Inculcating in them the spirit of good house wives, neighbours, and citizens as community models and social workers;
- v. Enabling them play active roles in the nation's political dispensation, liberate women from retrogressive customs and practices, for example, widowhood practices in some parts of Nigeria;
- vi. Preparing them for their secondary role of nation building;
- vii. Enabling them modernize some of the barbaric customs (bearing in mind the present future roles of our women at home) in the community, in the nation and the world at large;
- viii. Making them fit into the modern changing world of technological advancement;
- ix. Adequately fortify them against marginalization, discrimination, denial of equal employment opportunities, scientific and traditional beliefs; and

- x. Making them acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to develop uprightness and moral qualities such as honesty, tolerance, encouragement and capacity for working hard.

In order to achieve these objectives, countries around the world have put in place series of national and international agreements and policies mostly initiated by the United Nations Organization (UNO). Among these are the policies on the Universal Basic Education (UBE), in the area of economic development, if the girl-child is educated, she will engage herself in a large or small scale business. Those married to big time business men or entrepreneurs will be able to help their husbands. She will be able to converse and discuss intelligently and offer useful advice that will help them build their jobs. Such women will be able to deal with their husbands' business partners, friends and other highly placed associates without any feeling of inferiority complex. Like the opinion of Clinton (2012), the sub-region are gradually transcending from position of the deprived, to play strategic roles in development of the nations. Expressing similar view when she visited Africa in 2012, Hilary Rodham Clinton, and the Secretary of the United States noted that "small and medium sized enterprises run by women are major drivers of economic growth. She further stated that women are holding up half of the continent's economy. This calls for an increased support for them.

In addition, she stated that the girl-child should be given the chance to showcase her hard work and success to the global world, because when the girl-child prospers in her endeavour, she will reinvest those earnings in her family and the positive effects would cut across the entire community. If the girl-child is educated, she can also assist the husband in financing the home and education of the children instead of waiting for the husband to foot all the family bills.

Educated girls (women) assist in securing excellent health for the children and for the entire community and nation. For us to have good health, starts right from the womb. This is when the pregnant mother knows the type of diet to feed on, the right type of drug and exercise to take for the health of the baby. Once she is educated, she will be able to read and understand an enlightenment publication against any disease in form of the print or electronic media in any language. She will also help others to maintain and improve their health. Marital obligation of the girl-child helps her in the fulfilment of her roles as a wife and mother.

A married woman is supposed to take care of her home, husband and children. She is expected to use whatever knowledge and skills she has to cook, clean and rear her children. She will also assist her children with school assignments. She may also go beyond that by teaching anything useful.

attending Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and inquiring about the academic performances of her children. This will enable her live in a happy home and have well-educated and well-behaved children, contented husband and an endowed nation.

Agricultural Development: In the global world, half of its population is women, and two-third of the work is done by them. About 75 per cent of agricultural output in Africa is produced through women's effort (Abani, 1987). The potential contribution of educated and trained women labour force and the importance of their education in the improvement of family welfare and planning are factors still underestimated in national development. The higher the level of women's education, the greater the likelihood of them staying in the labour force. Those women with university degree participate more than those with only primary education.

National Reconstruction: Educated women will assist in nation building and reconstruction. According to Olawuyi (1983), the following are paramount importance of educated woman:

- i. He who educates a man educates an individual; he who educates a woman educates a nation.
- ii. The hand that rocks the cradles rules the world. In regard to this, the importance of girl-child education cannot be over emphasized.

Educated women are also better equipped to enter the paid labour force which is critical to the survival of the many female headed households in developing countries. Nations with high levels of female school enrolments in the past can today show higher levels of economic productivity, lower infertility, lower infant and maternal mortality, and longer life expectancy than countries that have not achieved a high enrolment levels for girls (Hodges 2001). Educating women yields high returns in terms of healthier children.

Women channel more of their income to expenditures on their children than their husband's. Educated mothers have better nourished children who are less likely to die in infancy than the children of uneducated parents.

The bedrock of the society is the family, and this is possibly why the family units are regarded as the most important social group. Consequently, lack of education would make it difficult for the average Nigerian woman to look after her family well and even keep them in good health. Education is the best legacy parents can leave for their children.

Conclusion

Education is the most valuable possession a person can have. Without it, poverty, disease and ignorance can be significant. Aina (2002) observed that education is a costly investment which is cheaper than ignorance. It is an

instrument with which a nation can develop. He argued further that since education is seen as an inevitable tool for national development, it must therefore begin with the individuals who make up the nation. This is more important because education is not just "book knowledge" but the development of an individual in all spheres of life. Education is more than mere schooling; the girl-child is educated, the global world would be a better place for us all.

Recommendation

Education is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits and values that enable him or her to function effectively as a member of the society. In spite of all concrete efforts made by government and non-governmental organization and donor agencies at increasing girl-child education in the areas of access, retention and completion rate by Nigerian government at all levels through several international policies such as Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goal (MDGs), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and others like the United Nations (UN) policies that stipulate modalities for nations to embark on and to make education free, compulsory and universal for every citizen, there are still obstacles to the progress of girl-child education in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2004).

- i. Posters, fliers, leaflets, brochure are to be widely circulated so as to disseminate unquantifiable benefits of girl-child education.
- ii. Curriculum formulators should be advised to do away with gender biases often reflect in our text books, course contents and examinations.
- iii. Press release, radio, and television jingles must be adopted to debunk and demystify some of the retrogressive norms that hinder girl-child education.
- iv. Special scholarship award, soft tuition, loans and other financial grant will should be given to indigent and gifted students so as not to drift in their education.
- v. Right Act and convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against girl-child should be strengthened and ensure that it is implemented in all states. The society should be sensitized on the importance of girl-child education, and enlightened them to know that it is never to see their education as a luxury.
- vi. Finally, government should through MDGs and EFA encourage girl-child education at all levels and make it compulsory.

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