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RE-THINKING THE PHILOSOPHY OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA: NUPE SOCIETY AS A REFERENCE POINT

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DR. OJO OLUDARE DAVID
&
MATTHEW JOSEPH HAMMAN

Abstract

In a globalised world, education is acclaimed as a potent force and answer to ignorance and servitude. It is recognized as the gate-way to the future and the key to national development. To ensure equal access to education, the National Policy on Education states that access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion, culture and disability. Universal Basic Education is the foundation for sustainable life-long learning which provides reading, writing and numeracy skills. It is on this premise that this paper examines, Rethinking of the philosophy of Girl-child education for social integration in Nigeria and Nupe society as a reference point. It briefly discussed the geographical, historical origin, occupation, culture and importance of formal education to the girl-child among Nupe society such as exposure, awareness, healthy competition and contribution to the welfare of the society. Notable examples of role models or personalities that benefitted from education to bring about changes in their respective communities were cited. This paper concludes, and recommends that aggressive campaign and sensitization should be embarked upon to create robust awareness of the importance of education to girl-child which can enhance social integration in Nigeria by the Federal Government, domesticating and implementing the Beijing platform of action and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Reflect gender issues in federal character, implement policy on poverty eradication and women should be discouraged in socialization of children based on gender among others.

Key Words: Rethinking, Philosophy, Education, Girl-child, Social Integration and Society.

Geographical Location, Historical Origin, Occupation, Religion and Culture of Nupes

Geographically, Nupes are located in North-Central Nigeria, especially, in Niger, Kwara and Kogi states. The land areas, occupied by the Nupe falls within the low basin's of the River Niger and Kaduna between 9°30' and 8°30' North Latitude. These cover the land area about eleven thousand and two hundred square kilometers (11,200 Sq km). The outstanding features of the physical geography of the Nupe land is that the River Niger traverses its length dividing it into two almost equal parts¹. The economic system of the Nupe hinged on four broad based sectors of agriculture, industry, commerce and transportation. The nature of the land inhabited by the Nupe more than any other factor influenced their economic pursuits. Therefore, several rivers and streams that enable large scale agriculture, transportation and fishing industries thrive. These include River Niger and Kaduna. Other rivers are Gbako, Gazun, Kampe, Dukku, Eche, Egwa and Walli². Farming is the main staying of their economy and Nupes specialize in rice, yam, cassava, beans, maize and guinea corn production. They equally catch fish and the women marketed all the aforementioned agricultural produces³.

Historically, the origin of the Nupes can be traced to Tsode Edegi, who fled the court of Idah and established a loose confederation of towns along the Niger river in the 15th Century, such as, Bida Doko, Kutigi, Zugurma, Nokwa, Rabba, Agaie, Lapai, (Niger State), Lafiya, Patigi, Tsonga, Kpada, Bacita and Kange in (Kwara state), Lokoja, Idah and Ega in Kogi state. The proximity of the Nupes to the Yoruba Ighomina and Yagba people in the south and to the Yoruba Oyo people in the South-west led to the cross fertilization of cultural influences through trade and conflicts over the countries. It was historically claimed that the famous Yoruba Queen, or King

Shango (also known as Jakuta) who was once an Alaafin of Oyo before being defied following his death was the son of a Nupe (Tapa) woman. Religiously, many of the Nupes were converted to Islam by Mallam Dendo, a wandering preacher at the end of the 18th Century and were incorporated into the Fulani Empire established by the Jihadists led by Usmanu Dan fodio of the Sokoto Caliphate. Nadel⁴ reported that Christian missionaries such as Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) established stations in Patigi, Tsonga, Kpada and Tsaragi where missionaries converted people into Christianity.

Few of the Nupes are still very fanatical about their traditional religion and uphold the principles, philosophical beliefs and practices of their traditional religion. Any imposition of Islam or Christianity is shunned by them. Hence, witchcraft and killing of fellow human being is regarded as hobby and celebrated annually as a mark of festival and achievement. The number of people that one succeeded in killing determines one's power in the community. The highest killer is feared and dreaded as Demi-god⁵.

Various cultures and social values have historically contributed to gender disparity in education of which the Nupe females are not left out. The marital institution is sacred and must not be defiled before marriage. Hence, deflowering of girl is an abomination and taboo which is seriously frowned at by the Nupe Society. Chastity before marriage brings honour and respect to the family, while acts of immorality are a shame to the family and perpetrators of any act of criminality. In Nupe society, humility, honesty, respect for elders and hard working are cherished values. In the community, women are not involved in any decision making, rather they are expected to be subservient to their husbands. Hence, the authority of the man remains unchallenged issues of importance to the family and the community, the men folks have the final say. Shaaba⁶ submitted that educating the girl child implies educating the community. He further reiterated that women are the water of the community and community with water will always survive. This connotes that for a community to survive and reach its full potentials they must educate the girl-child. Also at the national level educating a girl-child will enable them contribute positively to the economic and social development of the nation.

Girl-Child Education and Social Integration in Nigeria

The nation faith in Education as a social integration mechanism is properly documented in the National Policy on Education⁷. According to the Policy, the overarching philosophy of Nigeria are to (a) "Live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice"; and (b) "Promote inter-Africa solidarity and world peace through understanding"⁸. The philosophy of education comprises the following beliefs:

- i. Education is an instrument for national development and social change.
- ii. Education is vital for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria.
- iii. Education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society.
- iv. Education is compulsory and a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges; and
- v. Education is to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society⁹.

Girl child education would empower the females to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation in all its ramifications, politically, economically, socially, culturally, scientifically and technologically. It is documented in the literature that among the Igbos of Southern Nigeria, the educated women mobilized their counterparts to actively participate in political leadership as everybody was assigned economic roles. The implication was that, if one excels in his/her economic role it attracts political position Unicef¹⁰ and Amoubi¹¹ stated that women in Ika Igbo of Delta state, the women of Onitsha and Umuada and Aluturadis of the whole of Igbo land were powerful and acted as a watch dogs of the constitution and immediately sanctioned anyone who infringed on the constitution. Acholonu¹² quotes Handerson as saying that the Queen (Omu) was regarded as the King equal in some ways as she could compete with the king in splendor and had great powers over women. In Yoruba land, the Iyamodes "Iyamole"

were very powerful. Some of these powerful women represented their market associations in council meetings that manage the business of the society. An example of such women was Madam Tinubu, who was a great threat to the colonial government and facilitated the removal of kings whose style of leadership did not favour either the women or their communities. In the North with the coming of Islam, women played significant roles in politics. Smith¹³ cites the powerful political influence of Queen Amina in the 16th Century in Zaria emirate. Cultural perception and trapping of women as second class citizens and their affairs narrowed down to domestic issues, fueled by the colonial formal education, discrimination and stereotyping of employment and school curriculum fundamentally marked the beginning of man dominance over women in formal education.

To check mate the colonial excesses in the political platform, the women were determined to maintain their devoted position at all cost; this development administered into the Aba Women Riot and Abeokuta in 1929 and 1948 respectively which was staged to express their dissatisfaction with the colonial administration marginalization of women and some other aggressive tendencies¹⁴.

In the same vein, education empowered the women to form a formidable union to dislodge imperialistic philosophy of exploitation. The anti-colonial struggle marked the foundation of women emancipation, equality and empowerment in Nigeria under the leadership of Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome Kuti in 1945. Nigeria had the first fully national body organized across class, region and ethnic lines popularly known as the National Women in Union formed in 1953 which later metamorphosed into the Federation of Nigeria Women Society (FNWS). This society has political colouration in character and content as it was under this umbrella that women demanded political participation and direct representation in all legislative houses that ensure social integration. Furthermore, Bamisaiye¹⁵ opines that as a liberative tool educating girl child will challenge the patriarchal and capitalist nature of our society which has given to extreme regressive social behavior and regulation that appears as to exploit women. The patriarchal system set parameters for women to be exploited in the family and in the larger society by legalizing gender differential terms of inheritance rights. Nonyehom¹⁶ confirms that patriarchal is a set of social relation which has a material base in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them enables them to turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchal system is men's control over women labour, power that controls is maintained by excluding women from access to all necessary economically productive resources and by limiting women sexuality¹⁷.

She continues that this has been tacitly condoned by the different governments in Nigeria since independence and the consequence is the feminization of poverty and illiteracy in Nigeria. Poverty is feminised by dispossessing women of rights to inheritance of all forms, access to economic power or loan, rather women are seen as properties of their husbands rather than inheriting their late husband's property. They are inherited by their husbands relations based on the levirate traditional/laws. The extent of women repressiveness is aptly couched by Osasona¹⁸ that your home is doomed when a hen crows which implies that a man's home is wrecked once he allows women in it to air their views.

The Implication of Girl Child in Nupe Society

Eleanor Roosevelt famously said that education is essential to good citizenship and that education is important to life because it enables people to contribute to their community and the country, it teaches people about the world around them. When a girl-child is educated she contributes immensely to the welfare of the society, education bring about a kind of awareness that makes them conscious of their immediate environment.

Wikipedia¹⁹ submitted that in the thresholds of education and sustainability education benefits a woman in life altering ways. An educated woman gains higher status and an enhanced sense of efficacy. She tends to marry later and have greater bargaining power and success in the "marriage market" she also has greater bargaining power in the household after marriage. An educated woman tends to desire a smaller family size and seeks the health care necessary to do so. She has power and heals her children. An educated woman has high educational and career

expectations of her children, both boys and girls. For female education profoundly changes their lives, how they interact with society, and their economic status. Educating women creates more equitable lives for women and their families and increase their ability to participate in community decision making and work towards achieving local sustainability goals.

Shaaba²⁰ corroborated the above that in Nupe society educating a girl – child improves her communication effectively, socially with her peers and other male figures. He further explains that, give the girl-child a sound education, you are giving her the world, liberty to express her ideas, feeling, knowledge and information. Chu²¹ opined that ideas rule world, and like all rulers ideas can build or wreck. Ideas can help or hurt, clarify or confuse, enlighten or delude, facilitate or impede. We must pay careful attention to them to ensure that we do not blind fold and hang ourselves with the wrong ones.

Thus, the idea of educating the Girl-child is a plus to the family and the society. However, it is unhealthy not to educate the girl-child because you are not only hindering her from getting to peak of her destiny but limiting and stripping off her right to knowledge. Education brings information and these women become informed and they are able to handle situations properly. An educated woman is a trained woman, she is there to connect her family, society and country. An illiterate woman as a trained woman, might be productive but an educated is more productive. This is because she is exposed, western education provides a channel that helps in training individual in dream actualization, example abound of notable Nupe women who had distinguished themselves locally and internationally in the realm of education, politics, trade and commerce even in socio-cultural activities and singing. In the list are Dr. Mrs. SerahJibril (Minister of ethics), Dr. Mrs. Aminaodalolo (Former Minister of health), HajiyaFaadaliKolo (Member, Niger State House of Assembly), HajiyaAsmau Yusuf (Fin. Commissioner for Education), HajiyaZariabu A. Kure (Sector Abuja), Mrs Deborah Salamu (Permanent Secretary), HajiyaHawawuKoluSibonbo (SajiNiñabaMokimu), Mrs. Margaret Mamman (S.A. Chief of Service) and HajiyaKuluPatasi (Late singer in Nupe land). Shaaba (2011).

Factors That Limit Girl-Child Access to Education in Nupe Society

Many educationalists (Fafunwa²², Awe²³) traced the problems of women and girls' education to the colonial period and the advent in the 1950s of missionaries for whom western education was a mere tool for evangelization. They pointed out that while the southern states embraced western education, socio-cultural and religious factors served to constrain the north. Therefore, the following are identified as factors limiting Girl-child education in Nupe society. These are:

- (a) Historical and community factors: parental preferences for boys rather girls to be in school, create disparity in access to education for girls.
- (b) Opportunity cost: the opportunity cost of sending girls to school can be very high for some households because girls cook, clean, care for siblings and perform a variety of other essential tasks in the home.
- (c) Societal perception of female roles: unrealistic view of women has been a barrier because women are subsumed in the family or are perceived in terms of norms of domesticity that are unrealistic in the society in which women have traditionally contributed to family resources or income. The assumption that women are exclusively mothers, house wives and low human resource for national development have led to the compartmentalization for educational programs especially literacy programs. Dichotomization of roles and programmes have resulted in women acquisition skills that have not equipped them to become active economic experts on the contained, they have place more burdens on women. Women brought up in traditional Nigerian society tend to be less analytical, less capable in science or mathematical subjects due to the attitude of their teachers at schools and parents at home. Hence, the education of women as a group to some extent has up to date failed to lead to advantages comparable to those enjoyed by men. It has had a much lesser value in the eyes of parents, leaders and the society at large. This assertion is in line with Maccoby²³ findings and observations that the development of the ability qualities of independence, initiative and assertiveness. In Nigerian society, these qualities are thought to be anti-

famine, while women may be innately more aggressive and independent than men, social molding discourage the development and expression of these qualities in those girls who are potential intellectuals. Instead, they are subjected to archaic and rigid conception of femininity and thus denied the opportunity to develop an independent mind and initiative.

- (d) Financial constraints: rural poverty culture still persist in Nupe society. The cost of education is not within the reach of many parents, especially in the rural areas where the annual income per-capital is very low. Low income families, when it comes to choice between educating their sons and daughters will give preferences to the education of their sons when they cannot afford to educate both. Other cultural factors affect household investment decision, including investment in education. In Nupe culture or society, girls leave home when they are set for marriage and parents see them as belonging to the family of their husband. Boys on the other hand, bring their wives into the family when sacrifices must be made, the boy will be seen to offer the best reaction. Manguwat²⁴ reveals reasons why parents refused sending their daughters to schools which among are:
 - i. That if women attain equality with men, it will not augur well for the society.
 - ii. That women who are educated are corrupt and proud and cannot be easily controlled.
 - iii. That there are more broken homes in families where women are educated.
 - iv. That female children do not need formal education, instead they need only traditional training to enable them look after the home and that the male child needs it because he is the bread winner, an assumption that no longer holds.
- (e) Fewer Female Teachers and Non-Commitment by Teachers: Shortage of female teachers inhibits girls school attendance coupled with parental safety especially when schools are far from home. Also poor roads, poor living conditions in the rural areas, poor and late payment of teachers salary especially those of the primary school levels which eventually force many of the rural teachers to engage in life sustaining ventures e.g. farming, okada riding, driving etc. rather than invest their time to teaching which is their profession.
- (f) Poor preparation of teachers and lack of incentives (funding), Nigerian teachers are among the worst paid teachers in Africa and therefore majority of those who come into the profession do that as a stepping stone to other more lucrative jobs and are therefore not committed to the job. The Education Authority and the Professional Associations have not been able to regulate and control the influx of non-professionals into teaching profession and these inequities have further compounded the problem of maintaining any sort of standard within the sector.
- (g) Home and school distance: For security reasons many parents prefer their children to go to school located within the community or near by their homes so that they can be easily reached after school to support the family in domestic activities.
- (h) Inadequate, inappropriate facilities and materials: sometimes female or pupils do not attend schools because necessary facilities are not in place, coupled with gender bias in schools, a major phenomenon in some of our communities, the biases are apparent in school authority structure (especially where women are absent in decision making positions). Interaction pattern between teachers and students are influenced by gender which affect positively or negatively children's performance in schools. The school amenities and the process of teaching have a major impact on children's school attendance. Naik²⁵ reported that girls enrolling may be affected when the quality of the school is low. Irrelevant cultural practices/beliefs often hinder both boys and girls future chances for better jobs, thereby seriously curtailing the benefits derivable from their education, poor physical quality of the school, inadequate relevant textbooks, chalkboards, chalks and other necessary stationeries in short supply may danger children enrolment and attendance is likely to decline significantly. In the families where teachers are males and single girls are needed to assist them with household chores in teachers houses, such as cleaning, fetching of water and in some instances cooking and washing, sometimes these domestic services go beyond the household into social sphere, which may result in pregnancy, consequently leading to the female students withdrawal from school or even getting married to the teachers.

- (i) Lack of community support: communities in Nigeria see the provision of education as the sole responsibility and social service and the severe economic constraints and as the sole most unmanageable increasing national debts burden by national state and local governments make it difficult for them to cope with the high demand for the provision of quality education. The economic crisis has increased the demand as women in their work and duties as well as lower priority for education both among individuals and among governments. Therefore, without starting popular movements promoting women participation in education, women will continue to be victims and most exposed to the crisis. Missionaries and other private agencies that had contributed substantially to the education sector have not been doing so. For the same reasons, thus education like any other sector in development cannot succeed without the proper support by the community in which the schools are located²⁶.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concludes that our educational system needs to be restructured in order to develop a critical mass of men and women who will collectively and without discrimination pursue national development goals in equal footing. But this might not be easy because of the various gate-keeping measures aimed at institutionalizing patriarchal culture, consequently; this paper recommends the followings:

- (a) The federal government should domesticate and implement the platform of Action and the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CESAW).
- (b) The federal government should reflect gender issues in federal character rather than restricting it to regional or ethnic groups. This will ensure a wider involvement of diverse groups, and interest irrespective of gender.
- (c) It should fully implement the policy on poverty eradication and provides avenue for micro-finance support for women in order to boost their financial and economic base.
- (d) Women inside and outside politics should network in order to speak with one voice and present a common front.
- (e) Women should discourage socialization of children based on gender.
- (f) Women studies programmes should be set up in various institutions of higher learning to culturally blend behaviour, values and power relations in communities. This will enable the female folks to stop imbibing foreign cultures and assimilating their lifestyles and
- (g) Consciousness should be raised among women to enable them discover and develop a new orientation and stop them from running down other women instead of building bridges even across continents since women plights are the same globally. Compliance to the above recommendations with sustainable social integration, cohesiveness and tranquility in Nigeria,

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