
PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SKILLS THROUGH GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is a basic human right, vital personal and societal development and well being. It is an instrument for measuring the societies. However, the placement of Girl-Child has been very sentimental. The girl-child is used as a hawker, housemaid, inferior being and generally as sub-ordinate in all sphere of life, hence, the child once a female is deprived of education privilege. This paper therefore examines the concept of girl-child education, the importance of girl-child education and the strategies of promoting socio-economic status of a girl-child.

Introduction

Education to a larger extent is a yardstick for measuring the advancement of all societies. The global consensus is that, the social, economic and technological advancement of any nation is dependent, to a large extent, on the educational development of its citizens. A global campaign has been launched and awareness is being created by agencies such as United Nations International Children Education Fund on the need to educate children of school age irrespective of their gender. UNICEF (1998:8) states that “the denial of education harms the cause of democracy, social progress and by extension, international peace and security.

Education is the right of every child. The Child Right Act (2003), section 15(11) (2) State that every child has the right to free, compulsory and universal basic education and it shall be the duty of Nigerian Government to provide such education. In addition, every parent or guardian shall ensure that his or her child or ward attends and completes;

a) Primary Education; and

b) Junior Secondary Education

In most parts of the country, especially in Northern Nigeria, education is more of a privilege than a right especially for girls. If they are lucky to be enrolled, many are withdrawn prematurely because of the culture of early marriage. This and other socioeconomic and cultural problems such as poverty and ignorance account for the imbalance in school enrolment and education in which boys outnumber girls in schools.

There is an adage that says “educate a man you educate an individual, but educate a woman you educate a nation”. The above summarizes the essence of qualitative education to the girl-child and indeed, to every educable human being, and so, calls for special attention to be focused on education of the girl-child, this is because education is the bedrock of all facets of development.

The issue of education as a major determinant of the development of any nation is an acceptable phenomenon all over the world. The more members of a particular society have access to quality education, the higher the level of development of that society in comparison to other societies. Based on its importance (education) the United Nations adopted its Declaration of Human Right since 1948. Article 26 of the declaration states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(United Nations, 1967, quoted in the World Bank, 1985:23)

It is as a result of the above that, all nations have to strive to see that education is made accessible to all the populace to allow them participate and contribute meaningfully in the development of their societies and or communities. The significance of education in the development of any nation has been stressed by many agencies and individuals as a key to any development. United Nation

International Children Educational Fund (UNICEF) for example, has pointed out in its various publications the need to ensure that all children of school going age are enrolled in school and that both the boys and girls must have equal chance of participation. Ensuring the right of education is a matter of morality, justice and economic sense, adding that, the denial of the right to education hurts people's capacity to work productively. In this case, it is a matter of necessity that all nations must educate their people, both males and females.

The Girl-Child Education

Education has been the major issue that continues to receive attention concerning girls especially in the developing nations. Internationally, it has been recognized that girl-child education is critical to economic and human development.

Education of females is the most important factor in bringing about changes in their role and status not only in Nigeria but all over the world. With the change in status, they participate better and more actively in the affairs of the society (Rufa'i 2000 118).

The significance of quality education lies on how narrow the classroom gender is. A school is truly child-friendly when both girls and boys find it safe, welcoming and healthful and centered on the rights of the child. This is a major instrument in the development of any society and is in line with what King and Hill (1993:2 1) stated which has a significant effect on girl-child education, that "a country's failure to raise the

Education of women to the same level as that of men imposes a substantial cost on its development efforts".

In the year 2000, a review of the progress in terms of Girl-child education was made at the World Education Forum Follow-up held in Dakar, Senegal. Despite all the government's effort, it was realized that, 130 million of the world's school age children were out of school. The reasons and excuses for this failure are centered on "tuition and other fees, insufficient family income, poor teacher training and irrelevant curricula to the needs of the children" (UNICEF, State of the World Children, 2000). It was further stated that two-thirds of the 130 million out of school going age children are girls, which indicates that, 85 million girls of school age are not enrolled in school.

This indicates that, although the issue of gender parity has been internationally recognized that both boys and girls must have equal chance of participation, it has remained a worldwide phenomenon particularly in the developing countries. UNICEF (2000:6) states that all the effort and concern of the Jomtien conference the fact remains that access to school was still blocked for many children especially girls. The issue of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria has received a lot of attention by the various governments, donor agencies, non-governmental organizations and scholars. "Realizing the fact that, when both girls and boys have access to education, the nation is laying a solid foundation for progress and sustainable development, the country has been committed to many policies and programmes to achieve gender equality in schools". (Rufa'i 2000). Rufa'i further stated that:

Looking critically at the position of gender in education in Nigeria and in most parts of the developing nations, one will notice that women and girls are in most cases left in a position of weakness. They are under-represented. It is noted that their participation in education is always lower than that of boys especially at higher levels of education. The higher the level of education, the lower the participation of girls and women.

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Girl-child education is the education given to the female gender in order to prepare them adequately to meet their socio-economic needs and enable them identify their roles and position towards nation building and development.

Addision cited in Ikejiani (1964:19) asserts that:

Education is a companion which no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, no enemy can alienate, no despotism can enslave. At home a friend, abroad an introduction, in solitude a solace and society an ornament. It chasten vice, it guides virtue, it gives, at once grace and

government to genius, without it, What is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage.

In the light of the above quotation, for women to make the fullest use of their innate potential and contribute to development and modernization process in the nation, they need to be educated.

It should be noted that childhood is undoubtedly a period of sensitivity that requires special care and attention, most particularly the girl-child. In the African context, because of her gender, that makes her more vulnerable, and the so much expectation placed on her, due to some cultural practices, she is made to learn so much of the norms and set of moral values that avail in her society. This indeed, takes the form of the first bit of education she acquires, and is found in almost all societies, with little variations depending on the locations, culture and language.

The primary aim of educating the girl-child in all societies then, was no more than to enable her acquire appropriate attitude and orientation, and commitment to ensure full realization of her potential to the maximum. Considering the dynamism of time and culture, some changes are inevitable, they gave way to some transformation and modernization on the education of the girl-child she was bound to receive, but whatever education that is imparted is mainly geared on serving her needs, which is preparatory for the role she has to play in later life, looking after the home and future child bearing practices she is bound to be confronted with.

The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to girls in some African countries. The then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, Stated that in Africa, when families have to make a choice, due to limited resource, of educating either a girl or boy child, it is always the boy that is chosen to attend school. In Africa, many girls are prevented from getting the education entitled to them because families often send their daughters out to work at a young age, so that they can get the additional income they may need to exist beyond subsistence level, and finance the education of sons.

Importance of girl-child education

The gains of girl-child education cannot be over emphasized. Oriedi (2001) contends that investing in girl-child education is a future investment. Therefore, an enhanced education for girls is certainly of future importance not only for their personal benefits, but also to the advantage of their families and the nation at large, hence the adage, "when you educate a women you are educating the

whole nation". This is because not only does women education contribute to overall development, it also in turn promotes health, increases productivity and boosts morals and raises self esteem.

Education is expected to influence and affect the girl-child positively in the following ways.

- i. Positive change in attitude, beliefs and practices.
- ii. Development of sincerity, honesty and accountability.
- iii. Development of the Spirit of selfless services.
- iv. Patriotism.
- v. Development of self confidence, goal directed, purposeful and positive lifestyle.
- vi. Produce respect for other's socio-political and religious views.
- vii. Produce more competent wives and mothers.
- viii. Produce better family planners and developers.
- ix. Increase in family health.
- x. Rise in status thereby, contributing more in family and community decisions.

Education for the females is very important, it makes them play their role at home as mothers who must protect their children and provide them with good home training/education. Education makes them perform their duty or support the males in performing their duties in politics. Turai Yar-Adua is an example of an educated woman that supported her husband till his death. Stella Obasanjo was another educated woman who served Nigeria together with her husband till death took her away.

The level of education of an individual determines his or her output, an educated female is able to use her brain and everything in her to bring about positive change in the life of her fellow individuals.

Education will enable girl child to shun all criminal vices even in the school and outside the school.

The Federal Government of Nigeria love for education for all with the policy statement, that all contradictions, ambiguities or lack of uniformity existing in educational practices in the entire nation be removed. In fact, section 3 of the National Policy has special regard for women's education. It states that parents should be encouraged to send their children and wards especially females to in school. It was based on this policy that women education section, in 1986, was established by government to, according to Ugbe and Ate (1998), cater for:

- ❖ Provision of more educational opportunities for girls from primary to tertiary level.
- ❖ Create awareness in all and sundry that equal opportunities exist - irrespective of gender, age, religion, locality or special status.
- ❖ Re-orientate the attitude of all females, irrespective of age towards education.
- ❖ Awaken the consciousness of all women to the need for development for positive self image, etc.

But it is disheartening to see that despite all efforts made by the government to have equal education for all citizens in order to better their lots and make positive contribution to national development, the girl-child still cannot have the required quality of education expected of her. What is responsible for this setback in the progress of female education in Nigeria? Why can't a Nigerian girl-child have access to qualitative education despite the provision of enabling atmosphere for her to better her lot?

STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC SKILLS THROUGH GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

Nobody is disputing the relevance and importance of girl-child education in any nation, but the most important question is how to promote socio-Economic skills through Girl-child education? This is what the following paragraphs will discuss.

1. Provision of enough schools:

Couple with the rapid growth in the population of this nation, the number of school going children is also rapidly increasing as such there is also a crises in enrolment as well as admission into both primary and post primary schools. There should be more schools especially for girls and these should cut across primary, junior as well as senior secondary schools or rather lower and upper basic schools.

2. Provision of quality education:

Quality education will instill in the child, the desirable skills required for adjustment to future life. It lays the foundation of lifelong learning through inculcation of appropriate "learning to learn", self awareness, and citizenship and life skills

Education provided to Girl-child prepares her for entrepreneurship or self employment which will tend to keep her busy as well as make her become employer of labor instead of staying idle. Through this, girl-child can acquire skills which can be utilized to perform

certain jobs such as fashion design, household decoration, catering services, nutrition, Home management and child care service, Horticulture among others.

3. Removal of stereotyping in school curriculum

The syllabi used in our schools should be reviewed in order to remove any activity that may promote gender discrimination in terms of academic endeavours. That is to say girls should be encouraged to read sciences and technology oriented subjects as their male counterparts are doing. The girl children should be enlightened and encouraged through counseling programme especially orientation, consultation, information and appraisal in order to understand and feels that they can choose and study sciences and mathematics subjects like their male children counterparts, Women and vision 2010 (2000).

4. Public enlightenment and sensitization

To improve the standard and number of educated girls, there is a high need to embark on general enlightenment and sensitization about the benefits and importance of girl-child education. Counsellors should lead public to understand and appreciate the contribution of women in nation development. This can be done through group counselling, information dissemination as well as orientation services which finally assist the general public to acquire depth understanding leading to a positive change of behavior, Kolo (1997:89).

5. Provision of admission slots for female students

In order to encourage girls (women) to aspire to higher education, some good and reasonable percentage of admission slots into our tertiary institutions should be reserved for female in humanities, sciences and technology courses. At this juncture, functional counselling programme can be used to make available all relevant information needed as well as assisting girls as Okon (2001) puts to make a wise decision towards adjustment in their environment.

6. Procurement of special scholarship scheme

To encourage girls to further their studies, they're supposed to have a special scholarship scheme for female students especially in sciences and technology courses. This scholarship scheme when procured will serve as a motivating factor for female to read sciences and technology courses as well as boost their morale in furthering their studies to higher level of learning.

7. Provision of disciplined academic community

As a nation with diverse background, belief and orientation there is a greater need for the provision of stable secured and universally accepted academic community. Women and Vision 2010 (2000) stressed that in some areas in Nigeria, the fear of mixed schools as well as long distance is discouraging some parents' from sending their girls-children to schools. Likewise in higher and tertiary institutions sexual harassment sometimes lead not only to poor or low performance by the females but also to their eventual withdrawal due to unwanted and teenage pregnancy or fear of contraction of sexually transmitted diseases especially HIV/AIDs.

Other strategies include:

- Strong political will by those in government to support all policies and programmes financially.
- Active community participation in schools activities should be encouraged. The community should sensitized on the benefits of girl's education and should be urged to plan, manage and monitor

Conclusion

Education is a long life process that enables one to acquire knowledge and skills, shape, moulds and develop an individual physically, mentally, socially, morally, economically and politically. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. Effort has been made to highlight the importance of girl-child education and the strategies for promoting the socio-economic skills of the girl-child has also been discussed, Orifa(2005) is one of the many Nigerians that regard women as peacemakers. According to her, women "hardly start wars at the village or national level", therefore, since they are regarded as peacemakers, as adults promoting their socio-economic status will make them grow to be skillful and role models of their children

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