

**Assessment of the Issues in Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State:
The Implications and the Remedies**

BY

ATAKPA, Arit Okonobong, *Ph.D*
Department of Early Childhood Education,
Akwa Ibom State College of Education,
Afaha Nsit

AND

Inibehe Eyo EKANEM
Department of Early Childhood and Special Education
University of Uyo
Faculty of Education
University of Uyo

ABSTRACT

There are millions of girls in Nigeria who are dropouts from schools due to various factors including lack of value for a girl child. The research design used for this study was a descriptive survey and the research area for this study was Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study comprised all primary 6 pupils and parents in Akwa Ibom State as well as experts in early education. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 primary 6 pupils, 50 parents and 25 experts in early education. This gave a sample size of 175 respondents as the size. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "ISSUES IN GIRL CHILD EDUCATION QUESTIONNAIRE (AIGCEQ). Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. In the trial test, a total of 30 respondents who did not form part of the main study were randomly selected. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.85 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The study revealed that there are several issues of high extent of Girl Child Education in Nigeria. Also, there are various factors that hamper Girl Child Education in Nigeria, such as engagement of children as house helps, Girl child labour, lack of sponsorship, broken home, poverty, bereavement and truancy. The result also proved that there are various benefits of educating girls including decrease Infant Mortality. Finally, the results proved that there are various strategies of promoting Child Education in Nigeria including giving girls a strong foundation through early childhood development; focusing on basic education and many more. One of the recommendations was that education has a great role in changing the society therefore, awareness about the importance and impact of educating girls should be elaborated to local communities and societies.

KEYWORDS: Girl Child Education, Values, Importance of Child Education and Remedies

Introduction

Women in Nigeria have had various challenges in order to obtain equal education in all forms of formal education in Nigeria ASEC, (2020). Education is a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR, 2020). A positive correlation exists between the enrollment of girls in primary school and the gross national product and increase of life expectancy. Because of this correlation, enrollment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in any society Schultz (2002). Rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the calibre of women and their education in that country Nussbaum (2003). Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills Aliu (2001).

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 and disability (Funmilola, 2007). Before 1920, primary and secondary education in Nigeria was within the scope of voluntary Christian organizations. Out of a total of 25 secondary schools established by 1920, three were girls only and the remainder was exclusively for boys (Ogunyemi, 2015). In 1920, the colonial government started giving out subvention to voluntary associations involved in education, the grant-giving lasted till the early 1950s and at that point, education was placed under the control of regions. In 1949, only eight out of a total of 57 secondary schools were exclusively for girls. These schools are Methodist Girls' High School, Lagos (1879), St Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan (1896), St. Theresa's College, Ibadan (1932), Queens College, Lagos, (1927) Holy Rosary College, Enugu (1935), Anglican Girls Grammar School, Lagos, (1945), Queen Amina College and Alhuda College, Kano. From 1950 up till 1960, six more notable schools were established and by 1960, there were fourteen notable girl's schools, ten mixed and sixty-one boys only (Ogunyemi, 2015).

It can be noted that purposeful plans of action led to an increase in females in schools after 1990. While more boys than girls were enrolled in 1991, a difference of 138,000, by 1998 the difference was only 69,400 (Kitetu, 2001). At the pan-African Conference held at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in March and April 1993 (three decades after the UN Declaration of the 1960s) it was observed that Nigeria was still lagging behind other regions of the world in female access to education (Kitetu, 2001). It was also noted that gender disparity existed in education and that there was need to identify and eliminate all policies that hindered girls' full participation in education (Obasi, 1997).

Statement of the problem

Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Some Crucial Issues in Girl - Child Education are identified as Access to education, Retention and Dropout, Equity, Enrollment, Quality, and Achievement in school subjects. Among others, Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken home, engagement of children as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of the girl child access to education. In this paper, we will first of all try to explain the key issues, in girl child and education. Then we will present and discuss why the girl – child education is hindered and finally the strategies to promoting the girl child education in Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the extent of Issues in Girl Child Education in Nigeria.
2. To find out the factors that hamper Girl Child Education in Nigeria.
3. To find out girl how Child Education can be to Promoted in Nigeria

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of the Issues in Girl Child Education in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors that hamper Girl Child Education?
3. What are strategies to promote Child Education in Nigeria?

Literature Review

The Issues in Girl Child Education in Nigeria

Most of the factors that militate against the girl -child access to education are socio-cultural. Many countries on the African continent rank among the poorest in the world. The on -going HIV/AIDS epidemics, over -crowding in cities, tribal warfare and despotic governments have contributed to the degeneration of the beautiful African land into a human rights catastrophe. At the centre of the devastating situation is the girl -child. The girl - children appear to be the most vulnerable and most undervalued members of the world society. In a region where many are struggling to get enough food and to stay alive, remain out of reach of the various violent rebel armies, and to care for those stricken with various diseases, a basic education, especially for girl children, is low on the list of priorities.

Gender issues have become a household name in many countries today. Violence and inequality especially on the girl-child cannot be overemphasized. Many authors have written extensively on this topic, and have also proffered solutions to ensure that women realize their full potential and become equal partners in development. Onwuka (2002) defined Gender as the roles, attitudes, behaviours and values ascribed by the society to males and females. She went to say that Gender is socially constructed; learned for specific cultures, and can be changeable. It is based on society's perception. The Girl-child in Nigeria society is so relegated to the background in many aspects of human endeavor so much so that she sees herself as a "second class" citizen, and she has come to accept and adapt to the saying that "women are supposed to be seen and not heard". She has also come to accept the saying that "women's education end in the kitchen". As stated by Oleribe (2002), over the years, the girl-child has been grossly neglected.

Issues of gender equality in education have been the subject of much debate during the past decades and have become a prominent topic of debate in all countries. In Nigeria, there are large disparities between the education that boys and girls receive. Many girls do not have access to adequate education when past a certain age. In 2010, the female adult literacy rate (ages 15 and above) for Nigeria was 59.4% in comparison to the male adult literacy rate of 74.4%. It is differences in education that have led to this gap in literacy. The gender gap in literacy rates in

2000 at the rural level between boys and girls was 18.3 percent in favour of the boys overall. In the age group 6–9 years (primary school ages) it was 3.9 percent in favour of boys CBN (2000). This indicates that there is a gender dimension to educational attainment and development in Nigeria. According to the Examination Council of Nigeria (1994) there are still other problems, such as high drop-out rates of female students, poor performance, reluctance on the part of female students to enroll in science-based courses and poor classroom participation (Examination Council of Kenya, 1994). Across various geo-political delineations in Nigeria, a greater percentage of school-age girls are needlessly out-of-school, compared with the ratio applicable to boys of same age grouping Adeniran (2007).

Girl Child Education in Nigeria and the Hindering Factors

Ocho (2005) asserted that education involves a process through which individuals are made functional members of their society; as it is a process through which the young person acquires knowledge and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to him/herself and others. Since every citizen benefits from the result of the education of her fellow citizen and since every generation receives its education from an older generation, every generation has a duty to reciprocate by educating the generation that comes after it. (Ocho, 1988). Girls' education goes beyond getting girls into school. It is also about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school; have the opportunity to complete all levels of education acquiring the knowledge and skills to compete in the labor market; learn the socio-emotional and life skills necessary to navigate and adapt to a changing world; make decisions about their own lives; and contribute to their communities and the world.

Research has shown that millions of girls do not have access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward. Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken home, engagement of children as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access to education in the UNICEF A - Field made up of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and River states of Nigeria. According to World Bank (2003), More than 350 million people, over half Africa's population, live below the poverty line of one dollar a day. This implies that poverty, too, excludes children, including the girl - child, from school.

Girls' education is a strategic development priority. Better educated women tend to be more informed about nutrition and healthcare, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and their children are usually healthier, should they choose to become mothers. They are more likely to participate in the formal labor market and earn higher incomes. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and countries out of poverty. Educating girls has a far - reaching effect on sustainable development (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016) and girls should have an equal right to quality education (Jones, 2011; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014).

Reasons why Girl Child Education is Hindered

Educating girls has implications not only for individuals and households, but also for nations and the world. By raising standards of living through higher earnings and lower population growth, educating girls would lead to reductions in poverty. Furthermore, since girls and women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are the most affected by low levels of educational attainment, educating girls would also contribute to boosting shared prosperity, defined as achieving higher rates of income growth for the bottom 40 percent of the population in terms of socio-economic conditions.

1. Sexual violence and abuse factors: This also hampers the girls from going to school due to the fear of sexual violence; most parents deny their girl -children access to school.

2. Economic factors: Nigeria as an independent entity is undoubtedly characterized by very harsh economic conditions. This has resulted into scarce resources. As a result of this, choice has to be made between whom to send to school. Most often, it is the girl-child that remains at home. Due to poverty, girls get withdrawn from schools so as to help to supplement family income through hawking, trading or even working on the farm so as to support the family. In some cases, the girls are given out as house helps or even sent into early marriage because of a huge bride price (UNICEF, 2007).

3. The school environmental factors: Often most parents are scared of sending their female children to school in distance places and would rather keep them at home. According to Obinaju (2014), curricular, textbooks and other materials are usually gender-biased. She opines that right from childhood, girls are channeled into stereotyped traditional carrier in form of textbooks illustrations and stories consequently leading to the development of poor self-image at a tender age. Also sexual harassment during educational pursuit creates serious emotional and psychological strain on the girl-child.

4. Socio-cultural and religious factors: In most African societies, especially in Nigeria, the role of the girl as a wife and mother is conceived as the utmost priority not only by her parents, but also by the girl-child herself. However, in the Nigeria context, gender discrepancy in education is sustained by cultural factors. The wrong notion that her place is in the kitchen, to be seen and not to be heard have had very serious implications on the girl-child's ability at self-actualization. Obinaju (2014), notes that out of the 130 million children in LCDs without access to education, 81 million are girls. Also certain cultural and traditional practices like female circumcision, early marriages etc. are to say the least unprogressive because they lead not only to absenteeism distraction, but also to eventual dropout of girls. More so, the ethnic and values of some religions do not help matters, as they are often perceived with tremendous suspicions.

The Value of Girl Child Education in Nigeria

Education is very important for every child whether boy or girl. A famous African proverb apprises us, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)" (Suen, 2013). There are many disparities between women and men across the world and they remain persistent in the areas of access to resources, opportunities and in the matter of human rights. It is sad that some communities still discriminate against the education of the girl child, not realizing that illiterate girls grow up to be illiterate women. This results in lopsided development as it denies equal opportunities to equal citizens. According to

Kofi Annan (2003), there is no tool for development more effective than the education of a girl child.

The Importance of Girl Child Education in Nigeria.

Decrease Infant Mortality: Children of educated women are less likely to die before their first birthday. Girls who receive an education are less likely to contract HIV & AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. Primary education alone helps reduce infant mortality significantly, and secondary education helps even more. Awareness about diseases leads to healthy population and prevention of diseases. In India, for example, the infant mortality rate of babies whose mothers have received primary education is half that of children whose mothers are illiterate.

Improve Health and Nutrition: According to Kiki (2010) education greatly benefits personal health particularly for girl-child, it profoundly affects reproductive health immunization rates. Education may be the single most effective preventive weapon against HIV/AIDS. If the issue of HIV/AIDS is rampant in a particular country, the force and economic growth will be affected. Again through the awareness of girl-child education, the rate of HIV/AIDS will be reduced to the barest minimum and this will have positive impact on Nation Building.

Decrease Maternal Mortality: Educated women (with greater knowledge of health care and fewer pregnancies) are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or during the postpartum period. Increased education of girls also leads to more female health care providers to assist with prenatal medical care, labour and delivery, delivery complications and emergencies, and follow-up care.

Decrease Child Marriage: Child marriage –in some cases involving girls as young as 6 or 8 – almost always results in the end of a girl's schooling. The result is illiterate or barely literate young mothers without adequate tools to build healthy, educated families. On average, for every year a girl stays in school past fifth grade, her marriage is delayed a year. Educated girls typically marry later, when they are better able to bear and care for their children.

Decrease Population Explosion: Educated women tend to have fewer (and healthier) babies. According to a UNESCO, literate women had an average of 2.5 children while illiterate women had an average of six children.

Increase Involvement in Political Process: Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promote a more representative and effective government.

Decrease Domestic & Sexual Violence: Educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families.

Steps to Promote girl Child Education in Nigeria

More attention needs to be given to what happens before and after primary school. For girls and young women to acquire the skills they need, five steps – suggested by the World Bank's STEP

framework – are needed. The good news is that at each step, we have a good idea of which interventions can help girls fulfill their potential.

Step One, give girls a strong foundation through early childhood development (ECD). Disadvantages built early in life are difficult to remedy, but effective ECD programs can avoid such disadvantages and thereby yield high payoffs. ECD programs build the technical, cognitive, and behavioral skills conducive to high productivity later in life. Successful interventions emphasize, among other areas, nutrition, stimulation, and basic cognitive skills.

Second Step focuses on basic education. Gaps remain, to be sure: Data from a forthcoming paper suggest that in 24 low-income countries, only 34% of girls in the poorest 20% of household's complete primary school, compared with 72% of girls in the richest 20% of households. These income-related gaps can be reduced through interventions to reduce the opportunity cost of schooling for girls, such as conditional cash transfers.

Step Three in helping girls grow is to provide them with job-relevant skills that employers actually demand, or that they can use in launching their own business. Many countries have achieved (or are making rapid progress toward) gender parity in basic education. By contrast, labor force participation in most developing countries remains substantially lower for young women than men. In India, Nigeria and South Africa, more than three-quarters of all girls aged 15-24 are not engaged in paid work and are not looking for work. And according to the International Income Distribution Database, nearly 40% of young women globally are either unemployed or 'idle' (not in education, nor work). In addition are the millions of young women who are engaged in unpaid or unproductive work.

Step four relates to the creation of an environment that encourages investments in knowledge and creativity by women. This requires innovation-specific skills and investments to help connect people with ideas, as well as risk management tools that facilitate innovation. Again, girls are at a disadvantage when compared with boys, with fewer opportunities and, therefore, lower rates of entrepreneurship in many countries.

Finally, and this is the **fifth and last step**, it is important that societies promote flexible, efficient, and secure labor markets with women in mind. Apart from avoiding rigid job protection regulations while strengthening income protection systems, providing intermediation services for workers and firms is important to transform skills into actual employment and productivity.

Methodology

The research design used for this study was a descriptive survey and the research area for this study was Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study comprised all primary 6 pupils and parents in Akwa Ibom State as well as experts in early education. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 primary 6 pupils, 50 parents and 25 experts in early education. This gave a sample size of 175 respondents as the size. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Issues in Girl Child Education Questionnaire (IGCEQ). Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the level of reliability of the instrument. In the trial test, a total of 30 respondents who did not form part of the main study were randomly selected. The

reliability coefficient obtained was 0.85 and this was high enough to justify the use of the instrument. The exercise took about six days. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques such as descriptive analysis

Results and Discussions

Results

Research Questions 1: The research question sought to find out the extent of the issues in girl child education in Nigeria. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 1).

Table 1: Percentage analysis of the extent of the issues in girl child education

| EXTENTS | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|------------------|------------|-------------|
| VERY HIGH EXTENT | 64 | 36.57** |
| HIGH EXTENT | 56 | 32 |
| LOW EXTENT | 34 | 19.43 |
| VERY LOW EXTENT | 21 | 12* |
| TOTAL | 175 | 100% |

** The highest percentage frequency

* The least percentage frequency

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 1 presents the percentage analysis of the extent of the issues in girl child education in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (36.57%) of the respondents affirmed that the extent of the issues of girl child education is very high, while the least percentage (12%) of the respondents stated that the extent of the issues in girl child education in Nigeria is very low.

Research Questions 2: The research question sought to find out the factors that hampers Girl Child Education in Nigeria, Nigeria. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 2).

Table 2: Percentage analysis of the factors that hamper Girl Child Education in Nigeria

| HINDERANTS | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Girl child labour | 33 | 18.86 |
| Poverty | 22 | 12.57 |
| Lack of sponsorship | 26 | 14.86 |
| Bereavement | 15 | 8.57 |
| Truancy | 10 | 5.7* |
| Broken home | 30 | 17.14 |
| Engagement of children as house helps | 39 | 22.29** |

| | | |
|--|------------|-------------|
| TOTAL | 175 | 100% |
| ** The highest percentage frequency | | |
| * The least percentage frequency | | |

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 2 presents the percentage analysis on the hindrances to girl child education in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (22.29%) of the respondents said girl child labour, while the least percentage (5.7%) of the respondents stated that truancy hinders girl child education in Nigeria.

Research Questions 3: The research question sought to find out how girl child education can be to Promoted in Nigeria. To answer the research question, percentage analysis was performed on the data, (see table 3).

Table 3: Percentage analysis of how girl child education can be to Promoted in Nigeria

| STRATEGY | FREQ. | PERCENT(%) |
|--|--------------|-------------------|
| Give girls a strong foundation through early childhood development | 52 | 29.71** |
| Focuses on basic education | 40 | 22.86 |
| In helping girls grow is to provide them with job-relevant skills that employers actually demand | 31 | 17.71 |
| Relates to the creation of an environment that encourages investments in knowledge and creativity by women | 27 | 15.43 |
| It is important that societies promote flexible, efficient, and secure labor markets with women in mind | 25 | 14.29* |
| TOTAL | 175 | 100% |
| ** The highest percentage frequency | | |
| * The least percentage frequency | | |

SOURCE: Field survey

The above table 3 presents the percentage analysis on how girl child education can be to Promoted in Nigeria. From the result of the data analysis, it was observed that the highest percentage (29.71%) of the respondents said that girls should be given a strong foundation, while the least percentage (14.29%) of the respondents stated that it is important that societies promote flexible, efficient, and secure labor markets with women in mind.

Conclusion

Education is a basic human right, and because females represent approximately half of the world's population, education is the right of every girl everywhere and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community. Their right to education cannot be ignored. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country and their world. It is critical to empower women and to support them to eliminate gender disparity (UNICEF, 2015). Educating

girls keeps hunger away, reduces the number of child marriages and early pregnancies, improves health status and overall socioeconomic circumstances, and creates a better and peaceful society.

Recommendations

1. Education has a great role in changing the society therefore, awareness about the importance and impact of educating girls should be elaborated to local communities and societies.
2. Government at all levels should give more attention to girl-child education. This is because if they are well educated, they will have chances of contributing to nation building.
3. Government and non-government agencies should establish more boarding schools for girl-children to discourage parents from the notion of geographical distance, environmental hazards vis-à-vis the vulnerability of the girl-children.
4. Nigerians' negative attitude towards girl-child education should be discarded completely.

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