



## POLICY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES ON GIRL-CHILD ENROLMENT AND DETENTION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Education is a process of learning throughout human life, a girl-child is not exceptional, it provides girl child self-confidence and self-esteem, to attain good leadership skill, provides excellent child upbringing in terms of marriage and in general maintain good relationship with wider society. Therefore, this paper critically explored and reviewed related literatures on girl child education, the concepts of education, the challenges of girl child in attainment of education in northern Nigeria, significance of girl child education, strategic ways to improve girl child education and conclusion on the solutions of girl child education were exhaustibly discussed. Thus, based on the discussions, some of the recommendations were drawn, amongst which were that educational policies need to be reviewed periodically through effective evaluation, to monitor and to implement policy strategies that would influence girl child education at all institutions of education, the Ministry of Education should create awareness to all education stakeholders on the importance of girl child education in the country in the North, and there should be further in-depth research on the educational policies that would balance in designing a curriculum that covers the interest of the girl child for motivation.

**Keywords:** Girl- Child, Education, Enrolment, Retention, Completion, Policy.

### INTRODUCTION

It is a globally accepted fact that the main pointer to socioeconomic, political and technological advancement of any nation is the level of educational development of its citizens. The role that education plays in the improvement of the quality of people's lives, acceleration of economic growth, harnessing of human intellect and potentials, realization of political stability, appreciation of tolerance and the institution of peace and unity, cannot be quantified (Jasada, 1999).

Therefore, there has been a series of education policy changes in Nigeria since independence in 1960. The federal Ministry of Education is saddle with the responsibility of establishing policies and guidance for proper or uniform at all levels in the country. These are protected by several statutory mechanisms like the Education Decree No. 16 of 1985, the National Policy on Education and the 1999 constitution, Federal Republic of Nigeria. Meanwhile, the main focuses of Federal Ministry of Education are on six (6) shares of education, which include, Basic education, Early Childhood Education, secondary and Tertiary Education,

Adult and Non formal Education, then Special Needs Education (Federal Ministry of Education, 2009).

In addition, in October 2004, the Universal Basic Education system (UBE) was launched, which made it free and compulsory for every child in Nigeria to be educated up to the level of junior secondary school in an attempt to attain manpower requirements in Nigeria for national development (Osuji, 2004; Federal Ministry of Education, 2009).

Furthermore, with the above series of policies in the country, many boys are always found in schools than the girls especially in northern Nigeria, and equally the girl's rate of enrolment is lower among the children in the schools, their population is almost the same (Edem & thakur, 1979). According to Safiyanu, (1977) the ratio of one girl in primary schools to five boys in the northern Nigeria. Thus, very few girls in the northern part compared with those in the south in taking advantages of going to schools (Ahmad, 1977; Benjemin C, 2012).

While, to farrant, (1990) & Huzeru, (2012), have revealed that education is the whole learning process of human beings by which the knowledge is imparted, developed skills, and faculties trained. As a universal practice at every stage of development by the societies, and is a culture of people concerned with the norms, values, skills and accumulated knowledge. Thus, to Herbert Spencer (1850; in Huzeru, 2012)), education is considered as a groundwork for a complete life of in individual in society and should provide men and women with requiring skills, vocational training, practical knowledge, and critical attitude to be self-supporting and to live as useful citizens vocationally (Dondieu, 2010).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Education is a basic human right, vital to personal and societal development and well-being and all children deserve a quality education founded on a rights-based approach and rooted in the concept of gender equality (UNICEF, 2006). In 2000, 189 United Nations Member States pledged

However, education is a process of learning throughout human life, a girl child is not exceptional, where many parents consider it as useful only to the boy child, that girl child to be in school as a waste of energy, time and resources (Fatima, 2008; Huzeru, 2012; Atama, 2012). Thus, education to a girl child is crucial because it provides girl child self-confidence and self-esteem, to attain good leadership skill, provides excellent child upbringing in terms of marriage and in general maintain good relationships with the wider society (Gyimah and Duodu, 2006). It is generally accepted facts and statistics that the main indicator of the socio-economic and scientific development of any state is the level of educational advancement of its populaces (Abbagana, 2013).

### **The Concept of Girl Child**

Meanwhile, the term girl child is refers to a circle covers from childhood (0- 5) years to the (18) years (George, 2000; Huzeru, 2012). At these levels of development, the girl-child is controlled by the elder brothers, guardians or parents who are in the position to provide her with required socialization (Koenig, 2005; Atama, 2012). That girl child is in the position to shape her mental, spiritual, social, physical and emotional development, as a process to the highest level of young mature phases (Ocho LO, 2005).

Equally, a girl-child is regarded as a young female individual in the society, who would, in the long run, grow into women and marry. She is restrictive to look after the young ones the family (Etumabo, 2016). Thus, George, (200) girl-child is any female – child from birth to complete growth, especially a young immature woman formally or unmarried one. This definition covers all the female from birth stage through childhood-adolescence to the proper attainment of adulthood.

### **Significance of Education to a Girl Child**

The education of girl child is significance in our contemporary society, because it is a method where she will acquire necessary skills, knowledge, realizes her potentials and uses them for herself to achieve self-actualisation. Therefore, education transforms a girl child to become useful to the society's development; economically, politically, physically, and mentally (Atama, 2012).

According to Mensah, D. K. D., & Jonathan, (2016), that a girl or women with a basic or formal education in society are likely to seek medical care, make sure their children are regularly immunized, adopt sanitation practices, and be sure about nutrition requirements for their children. Thus, their infants and children, as a result, would be healthier, better nourished and have the higher rate of survival (Hawkins, J.D, Douek, H.J, & Lishner, 1988).

Therefore, girl child education as a strong weapon that resulted in poverty reduction, improve health and nutrition, reduce inequality, reduces women's fertility rates, lower infant and child mortality rate and increase women's labor force participation rate and earning in the society (A & Etumabo, 2016).

United Nations (1993) and Children's Act (2001) recognize that education is a basic human right that every child must enjoy. The International Convention on Human Rights (1948), Article 26 (1) as well states that everyone has the right to education and that education shall be free at least in the primary stages. Further, it declares that primary education shall be compulsory. However, the education of girls and women is seen as essential to achieve equitable development. Mwiria (1997) pointed out five compelling reasons for investing in the education of women.

“First, literate women are more likely than illiterate ones to promote the education of their children.

Second, it ensures gender equity as educated women have more access to formal employment than their illiterate counterparts.

Third, educated women serve as role models for their children and girls in general, thus enhancing the latter's chances of enrolling in school.

Fourth, educated women add to the pool of human resources available to nations confronting the difficult challenges related to environmental degradation, ignorance and disease.

Fifth, increasing female literacy by 10% has the potential to lower infant mortality by the same percentage or more. According to Schultz (1961), education of women has more social returns than that of males. Similarly, the Forum for Africa Women Educationists (1998)

notes that the total benefits of education multiply where there is increased female participation in schooling.”

United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) has advocated investment in girls' education as a way for all children to fulfil their right to a quality basic education. A singular focus on getting girls into school would bring down the barriers that keep all children out of school. Removing these barriers often involves addressing issues of wider community development, such as water and sanitation and early childhood care. Therefore, the education of the girl child is highly important as it guarantees a better Human Capital Development and wider participation; promote socio economic development and serves as a catalyst for sustainable development.

Education is fundamental to poverty reduction and it equips individuals to contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the society. However, studies have revealed a wide gap in gender enrolment in primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria inclusive caused by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs among other practices, as well as deeper forces that extend beyond the boundaries of educational systems.

Access deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. It is true that many governments make provision for the education of their citizens, but the provisions most of the time do not take cognizance of the peculiarities of the girl-child. In that case the girl-child may not have access to education, which is a fundamental human right.

### **Challenges of Girl Child in Northern Nigeria**

The out school children estimated globally is 115 million and more than 53% of them are girls, while, over 80% are in sub-Sahara Africa (Nmadu Grace, 2010; UNESCO, 2010). The implications of girls that are not educated in societies would end up less skilled, less healthy, with fewer choices, and not to contribute to the social, economic and political development of their societies. Then to become uneducated women at high risk of poverty sexual exploitation, maternal and child mortality, and other types of violence (Nmadu Grace, 2010). Thus, Yusuf & Ajere ( 2000), argues that women that are well educated in society usually prosper in ways that will increase their productivity and also improve their economic standing.

According to Ashamu & Abiola, (2012); Unterhalter, Elaine Heslop, (2011) that “socioeconomic status of women and girls in the northern zones lags behind those in the south: over two-thirds of girls in the North aged 15-19 years are unable to read compared to less than 10% in the South; in the North only 3% complete secondary school and more than 50% are married by age 16”. Equally, in 2010, the net enrolment rate was 55% for girls against 60% for boys; at 53% of girl's rates dropout (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

The girl child in Nigeria from historical, social and economic viewpoint has unequal access to education in relation to her male-child counterpart. This inequality could be due to the early sex role of the girls, which influence the conceptualization of their later status, and occupational inclination. In most culture in Nigeria, the female-child only plays a subordinate role to the male child. The female-child is neglected right from birth.

According to Uyanga (1995) parents are disappointed whenever the first born to the family is a girl and worse still when all children born to the family are girls. She further observed that the father of such family feels that there will be none-to propagate the family lineage or, take leadership of the family after death.

### **Societal Attitude toward Girl-Child Education**

The attitude of the society to girl's education and occupational choice. The society as it is today; is a male dominated one and preferences, choices and decisions are made in such a way that they favour the male gender. This attitude naturally determines the type of education women and girls are allowed to pursue Korode (2008), Moreover, girl child in traditional societies in Africa is regarded as a member of another family which cannot add any value to the family, while a boy child considered as an asset to the family (Tansel, 2013). Thus, the most valuable asset in the family is a male child.

In general, many boys are found in schools than the girls in northern Nigeria, and equally the girl's rate of enrolment is lower among the children in the schools. (Edem & Thakur, 1979). According to Safiyanu (1977) the ratio of one girl in primary schools to five boys in the northern Nigeria. Thus, very few girls in the northern part compared with those in the south in taking advantages of going to schools. (Ahmad, 1977).

Kaita (1972), in Iheanacho (2002), is of the view that the greatest problems that present themselves in female – child education are their home background, religion, as well as social / community sanctions. Accordingly, children are brought up right from the beginning with some feelings against western education. They are thus, indoctrinated and unwillingly forced to go to school for which they have already cultivated a traditional prejudice.

### **Poverty**

Furthermore, the negative effect of poverty on the girl child might be seen in the following classifications (Brock and Camish, 1997). According to Capo. O, (2016), early childhood 1-5 years, characterized by less food and a fewer visit to the health clinic, make a girl more susceptible to sickness and standard growth, 6-12 years, a heavy load of domestic duties, sibling care, cleaning, cooking, water carrying, and mobs the house where necessary. The adolescence-girl who are not in school and an economic burden are married off, at her early age, by parents arrangement and sometime even for cash. Teenage motherhood, babies born to a girl underaged are often born too early and are too small (O. Capo, 2016).

Rufai (1996) in his cultural deprivation concept maintains that the sub-culture of low income group is deficient in certain important respects and these accounts for the low educational attainment of members of this group. This view, places blames on the educational failure of the child, his family, his neighborhood and indeed, the sub-culture of his social group. Such a child suffers isolation brought about by poverty, meagreness of intellectual resources, illiteracy or indifferences of his elders or of the entire community.

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. In Nigeria, 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. Mwangi, (2004) wrote that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continued to deny the girl-child her right to education.

### **Government Policy**

However, the school organizational pattern and location also constitutes some little factors. In most schools, existing school set-up, instructional materials and other educational activities re-enforce the inequalities between the male and female child. Co-curricular activities in schools are more or less male dominated in nature and make no provision for the peculiar academic needs of the girl child. By implication therefore, the functioning of the school tends to portray boy superiority and domination.

Therefore, the previous findings show that gender inequality (boys and girls) still affects the educational advancement of the country. At all levels of education from primary to the university, gender inequality exists as more males are admitted to the tertiary educational level than females (Onyemulukwe, 1995; Odili, 2003; Heaton 2008). This require the government to initiate a policy that will bridge the gap between boys and girl in the process of enrolment and completion from primary up to secondary level of education in Nigeria.

### **Early Marriage**

According to Gomwalk (1996), early marriage continues to play an important role in hampering female – child's access to secondary education. This is because in many parts of Northern Nigeria, girls of school age, between 9 – 13 years are usually married off at the expense of their education. Early marriage and unplanned pregnancies among girls have caused low female enrolment in secondary schools more especially in the Northern part of Nigeria.

However, there are socio- cultural beliefs attached to girl- child education which has bedevilled the situation. Some parents justify the denial of girls of their right to education to prevent them from bringing shame to the family through early pregnancy. Yet others believe that women who are at the same level of education as the men are a disgrace to the community because more often than not, they will not get married and if they do, it will be to a foreigner. For such parents, early marriage is the best way to prevent this and at the same time preserve traditions.

### **Strategic ways to improve Girl Child Education in Northern Nigeria**

The existing law guaranteeing equal access to education in the country gave birth to the National Policy on Education which subscribed to equal education (between boy and girl)

seems not be too expensive to accommodate the condition of the girl- child. There is every need to make a further provision in the law to cater specifically and targeting the girl- child which is at disadvantage.

The Policy on Education is regarded as an old policy which needs to be revised to accommodate the existing challenges of the 21st century and beyond. The policy should have a broader base to cover for the yearnings of the girl- child education. The statistics of the ministry anchoring this policy on education needs to be updated to see where the gap exist and suggest possible ways of overcoming these challenges. Thus, government should enact new and effective policy that will give priority for education particularly girl child education (Grace, 2010; Hope, 2011; Amadi, 2013; Etumabo, 2016).

Government policies which force girls out of school on the ground of pregnancy should be eliminated. The private sectors can build homes where these girls should be housed for the period before they deliver their children. After delivery, the girl goes back to school without being exposed to any psychological trauma still uphold her self-respect and self-esteem. Increase in the job opportunities for young female “starters” vocational training in the private sectors combined with life skill education can sensitive parents and communities about the importance of girls’ education. Also, an improvement in income earning potentials of the women and young girls will enhance the sensitive and motivate the parents enrolling their girl.

There should be a collaborative efforts from the local governments, states and federal government, NGOs, Civil Society Organizations and Corporate Organizations can be facilitated to further improve on the low efforts geared by the government in improving the status of girl- child education in Nigeria and the Northern Nigeria especially where it seems to be worst.

Government, Community Based Organization and Non-Governmental Organization should provide non-formal education in terms of literacy/vocational lessons in their various Local Government constituencies for girls and their mothers. Okpoka (2000) indicated that when women are taught practical numeracy and literacy or basic skills needed of their daughters being educated.

Also, the National Gender Policy needs to be readdressed to focus more attention on the education of the girl- child from the grass root rather than concentrating on adult women only. This policy should be bottom- up based which will cover the Local Governments where the menace of poverty and traditional practices inhibiting the girl- child from attending school seems to be prevalent. Moreover, the National Gender Policy should focus attention again on advocacy, training, open air talks, campaign against gender gap and other means of educating the people in the rural areas especially on the benefits of girl- child education. Therefore, the policy framework ought to be revised and broadened to cover this scope.

## **CONCLUSION**

Meanwhile, based on various related literatures reviewed on the policy challenges on girl child education in relation to the cultural or societal belief, religion, teenage pregnancy, poverty and early marriage are some of the challenges of girl child education in northern

Nigeria which is urgently need government intervention and to declare state of emergency in educational sector. While, Egerton, ( 2008), opines that cultural belief, socio-economic and school-based factors which include, pregnancy and early marriage in primary schools affect girls enrolment in education in Nigeria. The failure of parents to provide adequate and basic education as their natural duties for their girl children by sending them to school, but probably due to poverty, illiteracy, religious or cultural fallacies has produced inequality between female and male children enrollment and completion in schools specifically in northern Nigeria (Baro, 2010).

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