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ISSUES IN GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
The study investigated issues in Girl-child Education in Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 147208 parents. A sample of 500 parents was involved in the study. The sample was composed using the multistage sampling method. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by researchers. The questionnaire was duly validated and its internal consistency was ascertained using Cronbach Alpha. Mean and Standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected. Results revealed parental, traditional and religious issues in girl child education in Anambra State that need to be resolved. It was concluded

that both gender should be given equal qualitative education to enable them develop their potentials, knowledge and skills, in order to contribute meaningfully to the State and national development. This will also help them to carry out their gender roles effectively in order to maintain peace and tranquillity in the society at large. The implications to sustainable development were highlighted. Based on the findings of the study, It was recommended among others that the government should implement the laws that will profit the right of the child, the government should make education sufficiently free from primary to the implementation of senior secondary school, the child policy on hawking wares during school should be intensified and government should create employment opportunities for the educated citizens especially the girl children.

Key words: issues, girl child Education.

INTRODUCTION

In any democratic society, education is seen as a catalyst for change and an instrument for political, economic and technological development. The National Policy on Education (NPE) stipulates that Nigeria philosophy of education is based on integration of an individual into a sound and effective citizen (FRN, 2004). Education is a potent force that brings about change in the attitude, thought, behaviour, skills, values and interest of individuals (Offor et al., 2019). It is these changes that bring about cognitive, psychomotor and affective orientation required for overall development. These changes could be learnt formally in school and are very crucial to members of a society for growth and development. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society. It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self actualization, to be useful to herself and others. In every society education connotes acquisition of something good and worthwhile (Offor & Orisa, 2017).

Education is very important for every child. It is one of the fundamental human rights that should be availed to all citizens irrespective of age, nationality and sex. The girl child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, easily and late adolescence state of development (Offorma, 2009). During this period, the

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girl child is totally under the care of an adult who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings. She is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into married women. She could be shaped by beating or giving punishments which aims at building and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on significant others in every ramification.

Girl child education is a process by which the girl child who transform to women are equipped with the skills, knowledge, habit and expectations that will enable them to be functional to themselves and members of the society. There are no more valuable investment than in girls' education. Educating a girl is one of the best investments her family, community and country can make. It is a well-known fact, that educating a girl in particular can kick start a virtuous circle of development. More educated girls marry later, have healthier children, earn more money and invest back into their families and communities and play more active roles in leading their communities and countries. More educated girls and women aspire to become leaders and thus expand a country's leadership and entrepreneurial talent. Girls' education makes room for future educated generations. More education means greater economic employment for women. Women with more years of schooling are more likely to find employment, own and operate firms; and earn higher wages. More educated girls and young women are healthier as adults and have healthier children which results to decreased maternal and infant mortality. Educated women are less likely to support militancy, violence, terrorism. Educated girls/women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence. Educated girl/women is more productive at work and better paid. Educated women help to control population explosion and do not allow their daughters to be victims of early marriage.

The Federal government promulgated laws and established bodies to promote girl child education, an attempt to critically examine the legal framework for formal education with a view of improving their levels of education in Nigeria. In order to achieve its educational objectives in the country, the Federal government made efforts to promote free compulsory, qualitative education for school children. This is in addition to the efforts by international institutions, nongovernmental organizations and other stakeholders in the educational sector. Although the

thrust of the policies and programmes are geared towards children, however, due to peculiarities and vulnerability of girl child, emphasis in most cases is placed on the girl child rather than the boy child. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended): The educational objectives of the government are contained in section 18 (1) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) stating that government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels and that: government shall promote science and technology. Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end government shall as when practicable provide free compulsory and universal primary education.

The constitution provides for the right to freedom from discrimination either on grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion. A situation where governments are not willing to pursue gender balanced employment policy is discriminatory against a girl child education. According to UNESCO Institute for statistics (2015), there are 757 million adults including 115 million youth who still cannot read or write a simple sentence women account for two thirds of all illiterate adults (63%) and the gap is nearly as wide among the youth. Young women make up 59% of the 115 million illiterate youths. South and west Asia and sub Saharan Africa are far from gender parity: women aged 15 years and above are less likely to be literate than men in the same age group. Meanwhile, youth in East Asia and the pacific have reached gender parity, joining adults and youths in central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean and central and Eastern Europe. About 57 million children around the world are not going to school. According to the report, children still battling to go to school, in the countries affected by the conflict, 95% of the 28.5 million children who are not getting a primary school education live in low and lower middle income countries - 44% in sub Saharan Africa, 19% in South and West Asia and 14% in the Arab States. Girls make up 55% of the total and were often the victims of rape and other sexual violence that accompanies armed conflicts (UNESCO, 2013).

There are crucial issues in girl child education in Africa, Nigeria and beyond. Access simply means the right of education and the opportunity provided for the girl child to be educated. Access

deals with the availability, convenience and ability to be educated. It is very true that many government make provisions 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 access education which is the fundamental human right (Offorma 2010). The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to girls in some Africa countries. In Africa, women are considered as man's properties or objects. They are also considered as a machine meant for producing children. These situations have resulted in unfair treatment of women, especially with regards to education of the male-child than the female child. In the traditional Nigerian society, there exists the belief that women are second class citizen (Enejere, 1991). The author opines that gender inequality in Nigeria is promoted by religion and culture. Young girls particularly in northern Nigeria are denied the benefits of education.

In many countries, it is very much clear that the girl is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life through childhood. It is more common in countries where men outnumber women particularly in third world countries. The bias against educating young girls is deep rooted in the culture and social traditions of developing and under developed world. In Nigeria, when families have to make a choice, due to limited resources, of educating either a girl or a boy child, it is always the boys that are chosen to attend school. The African patriarchal society favours boys over girls because boys maintain the family lineage. Boys are seen as intelligent and active and girls are passive and docile. The female child is treated with contempt and indifference. The girl child is expected to help the mother in household chores, take care of the young siblings and is also expected to take care of other household responsibilities by contributing to the family income. Girls are often moved to their husbands' home after marriage. It is not thought to be economically sound to invest in their future only to see another family eat the proceeds. Thus reduces the parental incentives in the education of the girls. Most of the girls are married off early and are left to fend for themselves with basic or even less skills and knowledge.

Thus, practice is the genesis of the lifelong exclusion of girl child from the social mainstream. When the family

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income is low, the girl child is used to raise money for the family. In some homes, the girl child hawks, engages in child labour or prostitution in order to raise money for her family. The girl child is made to stop schooling so that the available financial resources will be used to train the boy child (Ezeliora & Ezeokana, 2010). Pervasive school-related violence harms millions of girls and young women. The violence ranges from extreme acts such as kidnapping, bombing and killing, which often occur in contexts of armed conflict, militancy and political violence and in 15 countries around the world are directly targeted at girls (e.g Chibok girls in Nigeria, Malala in Pakistan). It also includes the often invisible but pervasive practices of sexual abuse, exploitation and bullying. According to Akudolu (2005), more than 30 percent of girls' in Southern Africa were raped in and around school. It is not only a violation of their human rights but it is also one of the most common causes for girls to drop out of school. An estimated 246 million girls and boys are harassed and abused on their way to and at school every year with girls particularly vulnerable. In Africa, half of all children said they had been bullied at school. 18 million girls aged 15 – 19 are victims of sexual violence often leading to school dropout and reinforcing cultural practises such as early marriage.

Early marriage and teen's pregnancy keep girls out of school. Too often marriage is seen as a higher priority than education. The low value attached to girls' schooling means few other options are available to them. It is estimated that every year 15 million girls are married before they turn 18. After their wedding they leave the education system and because they have fewer educational skills, they and their families are more likely to live in poverty. Countries with highest prevalence of child marriage are concentrated in western and sub Saharan Africa. There are child marriages in every part of the world, including Europe and North America. But the highest rates of girls under 18 getting married are in Nigeria (76%), Central African Republic and Chad both 68%. Child marriage imposes heavy costs for girls socially, physically, emotionally and undermines efforts to improve girls' education.

In many parts of the world, girls who are pregnant-regardless of their circumstances will be excluded from school. Many do not return, after giving birth due to those rules, stigma, fees, lack of child care and the unavailability

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of flexible school programmes. About 16 million girls aged 15-19 and some one million girls under 15 give birth every year – most in low and middle-income countries, according to the world health organization.

Funding is an important issue when looking at reasons why girls are not in school. Education of the girls is often expensive, because the amount that will be used to sponsor few boys will be invested on a girl. The direct costs and opportunity cost of school often impact boys and girls differently. Girls schooling is more sensitive to cost than boys schooling. Daughters are perceived to be less valuable once educated and less likely to abide by the will of the father, brother or husband. Male sibling will be given chance to attend school instead.

Girls often stay at home to take care of younger siblings and bear the main burden of house work. While educating a boy is considered a sound investment. It is sometimes considered to be a waste of time for girls. Many girls begin working as early as five years old – mainly in agriculture or in homes as domestic servants. Child domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, forced labour, sexual violence and many health issues. There are more than 168 million child Labourers – 11% of the children in the world – who are working instead of learning. There are significantly more girls than boys working in service industries.

Unforeseen events such as earthquakes, floods and disease can derail education for million girls. Families whose livelihood has been destroyed may no longer be able to afford to send their daughters to school. In humanitarian emergencies, including natural disasters, increased poverty for families and lack of employment opportunities means girls are at higher risk of early marriage or ending up in prostitution. Often, girls are marginalized and are out of school simply because they are girls and it is the cultural norm, their chances of getting a quality education are even smaller. Girls are four times more likely to be out of school than boys from the same background. The poorest girls also have the least likelihood of completing primary school. There are religious and traditional practices that discriminate against girls having the chance to get qualitative education.

In Anambra State, when schools were established, there were very few

enrolments because of cultural reasons. Boys therefore, naturally dominated the population of the school. Only a few parents did not conform to the dictates of the culture by not sending their girl children to school. In the early 90's there recorded poor male enrolment in the schools both primary and secondary schools. During that period, more girls were in school because the boys had left schooling to make quick money. Conversely in the 21st century, a period of economic recession in Nigeria, parents have gone back to status quo showing more interest in boys education than girls education. Most girls between 6-17 years are supposed to be in school but are found roaming about the streets engaging in prostitution and hawking different items. These girls engage in hawking so as to assist their parents as a result of financial status of their families. Some of these girls as a result of parental poverty are given out in marriage. A girl given out in marriage at a tender age is placed at a very high risk. She is not matured enough to be a mother, not matured enough to give birth and in the process of giving birth, could be exposed to certain viral infections and even loose her life. There is also the problem of teenage pregnancy. Many girls suffer from abuse. It could be sexual abuse or even worse than that. It has been observed that longer walks to school means less schooling for all but distance hurts teenage girl most. Teenage girls find it hard to travel far to school because they may face violence, kidnapping or be raped on the way to school. In the state, the government said that is education is absolutely free but parents are asked to pay huge amounts of money of which is equivalent to pay tuition fee. Therefore, small costs deter the girl children from going school, payment of school fees for those in senior secondary school, uniforms, textbooks and other fees deter the girl children from school. Finally, there is poor parental support for girls' education and poor link between education and employment. Based on the foregoing, there is an urgent need to give the girl child and boy child equal and qualitative education in order to have all round development.

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers to girl child education in Anambra State?
2. What are the measures to be taken to ensure that the girl children are sent to school?

Method

This is a descriptive survey carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised all the

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parents in Junior and Senior Secondary public school, in Anambra State (PPSSC, 2019). The sample size was 500 parents. To compose the sample multi stage sampling was used simple random sampling was used to select 20 communities out of 177 communities. Simple random sampling was used to select one girl's secondary school in each of selected communities. In the secondary school selected, simple random sampling was used to select 25 parents that will be issued questionnaires.

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Research question one: What are the reasons for not sending the girl child to school?

Table 1: Barriers to girl child in Anambra State

S/N	ITEMS	$\overline{X}$	SD	DEC
1.	Inadequacy of basic facilities in the school	3.41	0.73	Positive
2.	Schools are far from their homes	2.11	0.63	Negative
3.	Some parents are poor	3.44	0.75	Positive
4.	Insecurity and violence	3.44	0.75	Positive
5.	Poor parental educational attainment	2.01	0.51	Negative
6.	Child labour	3.41	0.73	Positive
7.	Lack of sponsorship	3.33	0.75	Positive
8.	Bereavement of parents	3.65	0.58	Positive
9.	Broken homes	3.41	0.73	Positive
10.	Engagement of girls as house helps	3.44	0.71	Positive
11.	Inadequate resources and support in schools	3.65	0.56	Positive
12.	Some parents think that educating their girls will bring about immoral behaviour	3.65	0.56	Positive
13.	Some parents see girl child education as wasted investments	3.43	0.74	Positive
14.	Early marriage	3.41	0.73	Positive
15.	Preference of male child to girl child.	3.65	0.56	Positive
16.	Girl children are asked to stay back and look after their sick relations and young siblings.	3.53	0.77	Positive
	Cluster total	52.97	10.94	
	Cluster mean	3.31	0.68	

Results in table 1, show that the respondents reacted positively to fourteen items and negatively to item no 2 and 5 which states as follows "schools are far from their homes" and "poor parental educational attainment". The cluster mean of 3.31 (SD = 0.64) show that the respondents agreed that the listed barriers are responsible for persistent increase for not sending their girl children to school.

Research question two: What are the measures to be taken to ensure that the girl children are sent back to school?

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Table 2: Measures to be taken in order to send the girl child to school

S/N	ITEMS	$\overline{X}$	SD	DEC
17.	Policy makers should create enabling environment for increasing gender participation in the political, business, financial market, technology and agricultural sectors.	3.33	0.76	Positive
18.	Opportunities should be created to enable the educated girl child to be transformed into women that will be agents of change	3.65	0.59	Positive
19.	Seminars should be organized to let girls know that they must be educated.	3.41	0.74	Positive
20.	Government should promulgate laws: as imprisonment of any person found guilty of not sending her girl child to school.	3.65	0.56	Positive
21.	Nongovernmental organizations should operate in areas where early marriage is prevalent and are to educate parents on the importance of educating their girl child instead of marrying them off.	3.33	0.77	Positive
22.	Government should sponsor girl rescued from early marriage back to school.	3.44	0.75	Positive
23.	Government will establish centres where girls rescued from early marriage are accommodated, taken care of and counselled before sending them back to school.	3.53	0.81	Positive
24.	Cultural practice that inhibits girl child education should be overhauled.	3.44	0.76	Positive
	Cluster total	27.78	5.76	
	Cluster mean	3.47	5.10	

Results in table 2 showed that all the listed measures attracted positive responses with mean scores well above 2.5. The cluster mean of 3.47 (SD 5.10) indicate that, in the opinion of the respondents, all the identified measures are better ways of tackling the problems of gender disparity in education in Anambra State.

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Discussion

The results as presented in table 1 showed that apart from the disagreements indicated by the respondents for items 2 and 5 which states as follows "schools are far from the homes" and "poor parental educational attainment", all the respondents agreed to all the other items, indicating that the identified reasons contribute to persistent increase in gender disparity in education in Anambra State. Some of the findings of the study on the reasons why the girl child are not sent to school, such as, early marriage, preference of male child to girl child, some parents see girl child education as wasted investments in line with the findings of Ezeliora & Ezeokana (2010). Others are that some parents are poor, insecurity and violence, inadequate resources and support which are in line with the findings of Odebode (2018), Ikekeonmwu (2010) Akudolu (2005), that inadequacy of basic facilities in the school and inadequate resources and support in schools hamper girl child education. Also, in support of the above findings, Offorma (2010) stressed that girl children are asked to stay back and look after their sick relations and young siblings; bereavement of parents. The findings also showed that the respondents disagreed to the factors that schools are far from their homes because in the 21st century, more schools have been built and renovated by the past government. Also in the 21st century more women are more educated than the men. However, the study revealed that both the parents and government contribute a lot to the reasons why the girl child are not sent to school.

The results as presented in table 2 showed that all the respondents agreed to all items. Some of the listed measures aligned with the findings of the scholars. For example, the measure on "opportunities should be created to enable the educated girl child to be transformed into a woman that will be agent of change". This is in line with Offorma (2010) who states that girl child should be given every opportunity and all necessary support to access education at all levels. Also, the measure that points to "cultural practice that inhibits girl-child education should be overhauled" is in line with Ezeokana & Ezeliora (2010) who states that, in the homes, the girl child is exposed to experience the traditional practices, norms and values designed to sustain

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patriarchy gender in equality. Male preference is the genesis of all the problems of the women/girls in the society. By implications, any girl-child that did not receive education will not develop her skill, will not be knowledgeable and will remain dependent on her parents before marriage on her husband after marriage and on her children when her husband dies. All the identified measures centred majorly on the government to create enabling environment and equal opportunities for both male and female to have access to qualitative education.

Implications for Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a process which involves human's intelligence, decision making, efficiency, planning and management skills, power of imagination, entrepreneurship, development and production with environmental safety. According to Holmberg & Samuelson (2006) sustainable development means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Everything about sustainable development is geared towards the future generation. Education is the key to development therefore every society that needs development must carry both male and female along. Through education one acquires, skills, knowledge, attitude, habits, expectations and values that will enable on individual to live his life effectively in his society. Therefore, educating the girl child translates to better health for the future generation, education of the future generation, reduction in child morbidity and mortality, thus triggering a snow ball effect of achieving all other sustainable development goals in a viable manner. In the contrary, there will be lopsided development, more illiterates in the society, people will not realize their full potentials and natural endowments, ignorance will be the order of the days leads to political apathy and instability in the government.

Conclusion

According to Kwegger Aggrey, educate a man, you educate an individual but educate a woman, you educate a whole nation. The benefits of educating the girl child can never be overemphasized. Education is a right and not a privilege therefore every child must have equal access to education despite the gender and should be given qualitative education whereby they will acquire the knowledge, skills and discover their

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potentials in order to effectively participate in the society. Also should be provided with the enabling environment to practice what she learnt in the school and employment opportunities should be created to be a motivator those who yet receive education.

Recommendations

To avoid the impending danger of not sending the girl child to school, the following steps could be taken:

1. The government should implement the laws that protect the right of the child.
2. The government should make education totally free; at least from primary to senior secondary.
3. Policy makers should create an enabling environment for increasing gender participation in the politics, agric sectors and technology.
4. Equal opportunities should be given to the educated girl child and boy child to be transformed.
5. The government should abolish early marriage.
6. The parents of girl child seen hawking or is out of school without any cogent reason should be prosecuted.
7. Parents should be encouraged to give birth to the number of children they can educate and take care of.
8. Government should give loans to poor parents to assist them in educating their children (especially the girl child).
9. The government should create employment opportunities for the educated citizens. This will go a long way in motivating those who do not have interest in education.

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