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Girl-Child Education for National Development in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse

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Abstract: Education is the fundamental basis for the development of any nation. Education not only promotes development but also ensures that development attained can be sustained. Sadly, in most countries in Africa and even across the world girl-child education is still far behind, Nigeria today in international ratings ranks very low with about fourteen million children out of school and sixty percent of these children are girls as a result of many societal factors such as cultural beliefs, social norms and parental factors amongst others. Education is of vital importance to growth and development, people's minds through informed thinking pave ways for developmental achievements in every area of human endeavour. For nations to fully access the benefits, of development there is no better way than through quality education. It is on this basis that the paper examines the relationship between girl-child education and national development and further identifies the benefits of educating the girl child and concludes that girl-child education is of utmost relevance and at the very core of national development.

Keywords: Girl-child, Education, Development, Nigeria, Society

Introduction

Over the years, there has been a rising debate across the world in respect to the promotion of equality and

bridging of gender gaps in education; the issue of the girl-child having proper access to education is today still a rising and urgent global concern

in many countries. Despite the various global programmes and implementation strategies as well as the gross amount of partnership across the world, many African and Asian continents suffer setbacks in the area of equal education especially for the girl-child. In accordance with the 1948 universal human rights declaration, access to education is one of the basic human rights, with article 26 clearly stating that every individual is entitled to the right to access free education at least in basic and foundational stages (U.N, 1948).

Since independence in 1960, the Nigerian government has put in efforts to increase its citizen's access to education with greater focus on the girl-child in the 1980s (Dauda, 2007). This was done by the establishment and creation of various policy programmes and incentives such as policy on education, national policy on gender in basic education, national gender policy and the universal basic education act (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008). Despite all this policy programmes put in place, many Nigerian girl-children still suffer various obstacles to access and attain quality education.

Education is an incentive that is likely to contribute to the development of any nation because it equip its citizens to be actively part of its development process (UNICEF, 2000). Therefore, it can be said that education and national development are interrelated, producing high level of productivity and innovation likely to bring about national development (Boyi, 2014). In addition this paper is structured into introduction, Literature review,

theoretical framework, methodology, discussion of findings and recommendations.

Literature Review

Concept of Girl-Child Education

Girls constitute a larger percentage of the 7.6 billion people across the world, this shows the greater need to focus more attention towards issues affecting their education in relation to national development. Women and girls have strategic roles to play in the growth and development of their nations and once they are not able to meet up their quota it causes a strain to maintaining and sustaining any form of development be it health, economic or political (Mulkah, 2015). According to (Ugwu, 2015), the word education originally in the Latin word is "educare" which means to mould or train.

Amale (2011) also explains education to be the overall enhancement of a child's skills and capabilities to fit into the needs of the society, making the child useful and productive to both himself and his nation leading to significant growth and development. To further buttress on the above point Sutherland (2001) describes a girl-child as one who needs proper guidance by individuals that she can pattern her life after through imitation and proper leadership, this means that a girl child is a functional member of her society, but in order for her to function properly, she needs to be properly trained, developed and built up to actualize and effectively translate her aspirations, potentials and function in the rightful place in her community

and society, and this can only be realized through proper education.

Okebukola (2014) further defines girl-child education as a major way of ensuring that women and girls are strategically positioned properly to contribute effectively and efficiently towards national development. Education is a vital tool to ensure the development of any country because it brings out and develops hidden potentials making the girl-child a useful contributor to her community and for the sustenance of national development by developing her attitude, skills and productivity level achieved through the teaching and learning process (Fafunwa, 1974).

In most societies, especially developing ones have a particular perspective of whom and what a girl child should be, thereby, limiting the extent to which this child discovers and maximizes her full potentials. Research shows that education is very vital and efficient to the development and investment any nation can attain, proper investment in education aids the accomplishment of various national development goals and increase the possibility that its progress will be sustained (Adebayo, 2000).

Concept of National Development

National development can be described as a multifaceted process, which involves the restructuring and repositioning of a whole system which maybe in the areas of economic, political, education and even social development. National development could be at various levels but at the individual level it encompasses self-capacity in the

maximization of skills and creativity leading to innovations and ground braking achievements (Ugwu, 2015).

Bruntland Commission (1987) suggests that the major aim of national development should be to meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of the upcoming generation to meet their own needs. Obasi (2010) sees national development as a social process by which a nation is able to make resources readily available for the sole purpose of bettering and enhancing its citizens standard of living by the provision of good jobs, social amenities such as quality education, proper infrastructures, and access to good medical care (Thom-otuya, Inko-tariah, 2016).

National development should create avenues to empower persons and communities to be able to discover and maximally put to use their skills and potentials to actualize their dreams and aspiration (Munasinge, 2004).

Age (2005) pointed out that national development should be able to meet certain basic needs of its citizenry such as water, proper access to medical care, employment, infrastructure and access to quality education. For any country to experience national development of any kind there has to be a transformation in its intellectual and social outlook, for any form of advancement to take place there must be a revolution and liberation in our minds because anything that translates to a successful reality begins in the mind which is preceded by proper education that help remold, reorient

and reorganize our lives and that of the society. It is to this effect that Ugwu (2015) further emphasizes that a developing or developed nation should be able to prove its development process by the following identified factors:

- a Quality education
- b Poverty elimination
- c Self-sufficiency of food production
- d Capacity to solve internal problems
- e Proper social justice
- f Equal distribution of social services
- g High level of employment

Causing overall restructuring and transformation of its society (Ugwu, 2015).

Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

The girl-child accessibility to education in Nigeria especially in rural communities still remains very low (UNICEF, 2007). Many Nigerian girls no longer have access to education at a particular age due to many factors (Lawal, 2017). The best investment plan any country can make towards its development is in the educating and empowering of its girl-child population. In Nigeria today with almost seventy percent of its population living below poverty line many girl-children take to hawking on the streets, forced into early marriage leading to teenage pregnancies thereby lots of this girls end up dropping out of school even before they get to primary six (UNICEF, 2007). Other barriers hindering girl-children enrollment and attendance of school in Nigeria also includes social and cultural vices as well as religious

misconceptions (UNICEF, 2015). It is as a result of this that over the years there has been rigorous and continuous debate and research been carried out based on the concerns of girl-child education and many views raised which is, educating a girl-child can either be formal or informal (Okorie, 2007). Formal meaning a structured school programme setting which they obtain the best learning experience in different fields of study while informal involves education given to out of school girls for vocational training and skill enhancement enabling them to stand economically (Abdulkarim, 2014). But most importantly according to Iwalaiye (2016) what matters most is that the process of educating a girl-child is to be able to make here function effectively and thrive as a member of her society through the knowledge she acquires thereby allowing her to discover who she really is and enable her use her potentials maximally.

The ability of any country to maximally use and enjoy the benefit of its human resources largely depends on education or the lack it, education directly impacts on the output a citizen is able to effectively contribute to his/her nation as every individual both male and female has a quota to bring to the table and if there is no balance from any side causes a strain and hinders national development.

Relationship Between Girl-Child Education and National Development

Education is an indispensable tool in the accomplishment of national

development, for any country to experience growth it must reorganize and properly address the standard and quality of its educational system (Ugwu, 2015). Investing in a girl-child brings about so much benefits that not only enhances but sustains national development for example low mortality rate, educated girls know how to access proper medical care, better nutrition reducing the rate and spread of diseases etc. in simple terms when you educate a girl you educate a whole nation. Every country today is faced with various challenges but the main essence of national development is that these challenges should not define us what should define us is the ability for us to proffer lasting workable solutions to deal with these challenges. The solutions can only come from an educated and enlightened mind. This is the reason why the human capital development of a nation should be equipped and used maximally only then can it translate into functional resources for national development (Mulkah, 2015), therefore producing useful citizens that will play effective roles in Scio-economic development and in other sectors that make up the society (Ugwu, 2015). It is for this reason that Umoh (2005:224) describes education and national development as “two sides of a coin” he also goes further to explain that education and national development are closely knitted, linked and interrelated. National development is largely focused on bringing forth and creating something new to enhance the living standard of its citizens while education is the mechanism that ensures that it

sustains the desired development. Education therefore is crucial in equipping the girl-child with proper proficiency in discovering her capabilities and skills thereby boosting her level of self-confidence in other to see the challenges around her and contribute meaningfully in proffering solutions enabling her play her part in the development process of her society. It can however be said that “the quality of our workforce is a direct reflection of our educational system” (president Jonathan 2010) (cited in Ugwu 2015:2). Therefore “Education is the heart of national development and the source of quality human capital development that will propel Nigeria among top world economies” if proper maximized and utilized (President Jonathan, 2011) (cited in Ugwu, 2015:2).

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the human capital formation and manpower-planning model as its framework of analysis. This theory’s main crust states that skills, education and experience are the major factors that establish total development for any nation (Jhingan, 2007). Using this, the human capital formation theory argues that a girl-child is a functional and vital member of her society and has a role to play in its development process and should be recognized as an eligible player. The theory further emphasizes on the need for the provision of the various and necessary educational opportunities to help develop her creativity and skills equipping her with proper knowledge to make enlightened decisions (Deborah, 2016), boost her values and competencies to help her work for the

betterment of herself and to the advantage of her society (Mulka, 2015), building and enhancing national development (Deborah, 2016). It is to this end that Fagerlind (1997) posits that various resources a country may possess cannot be compared to the output that will be derived from its human resources if used maximally. Fagerlind further describes citizens of a nation as active agents that build its social, economic and political systems, which help carry and sustain national development.

Education in itself creates opportunities for the growth and development that is desired and if government agencies make educating its girl-child population a major priority by making viable policies and ensure its implementation, establishing programmes and incentives that motivates girls to enroll and complete their education creates long term opportunity for sustained development (Psacharopoulos, 1997). According to Jhingan (2007) manpower planning focuses on ensuring long-term developments using a country's semi-skilled and skilled manpower economic conditions to broaden employment opportunities through proper and adequate investment in human resource development and education.

Methodology

This paper adopts the historical method through the use of secondary data obtained relevant books, journals, Internet sources, seminar papers and several published articles to analyze

the importance of girl-child education to national development in Nigeria.

Factors Hindering Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Education is the bedrock on which sustainable development can be achieved. Proper education enables citizens to be actively involved in the growth and development process of their nation contributing meaningfully. Over the years there has been collective efforts on both national and international frontiers to see the total eradication and elimination of gender gaps in education. The benefits of girl-child education to a nation cannot be overemphasized and are inexhaustible but despite these various efforts through partnerships, policy programmes and incentives, there are still factors that hinder adequate accessibility to education for the Nigerian girl-child which are identified below:

1. Early Marriages: while the issues of early child marriage can affect both boys and girls, in most places across the world it affects the girl child the most (World bank, 2016). Girls who have no education are three times likely to get married by the age of 18 compared to girls with secondary or higher education (Girls not brides, 2019). Over sixty percent of women between ages 20-24 with no education were married before 18.

Most girls in certain parts of Nigeria are given out in marriage once they hit puberty (British council, 2012). Most parents who don't see the relevance of

education often see marriage as the best option for them, while parents who cant afford to bear the educational burden as a result of poverty see marriage as an economic value through the payment of bride price (British council, 2012), making these girls drop out of school and most often returning is too difficult because of the burden of their new responsibilities.

2. Poverty: In Nigeria with about seventy percent of families living below Poverty lines most girl-children cannot afford the cost of been in school because most times after payment of fees other demands like textbooks, uniforms are unaffordable for them as a result of this most of this girls are sent into the streets to hawk to support their family, or given out as domestic staffs in other homes, or married off to relieve the family of the burden to support them. An estimate of 15 million children in Nigeria work full time and majority of this figure are girls who have to meet certain family need forcing them to drop out of school even before primary six (UNICEF, 2004).
3. Lack of Proper Policy Implementation: Policies no matter how well Formulated and introduced without it been properly implemented it is of little or no importance the major aim of any good policy is its ability to be successfully implemented. In Nigeria we have a lot of

beautifully penned down policies as regards girl-child education with many not translated to reality, most at times these policies are half way kick-started but never successfully implemented either because of change in governance which leads to lack od continuity or lack of political will because of little or no profiting for politicians involved, corruption and syphoning of funds meant for these projects leading to no progress whatsoever.

4. Socio- Cultural Barriers: It is most common that cultural beliefs influence the decision-making of parents over their children. In most communities boy children are preferred to be sent to school with the believe that they will inherit and carry on the family name while the girl child will be married off to another family (Mahdi, 2011 cited in British council 2012). Most often educating a girl child may be seen as a waste of time and resources and these girls would rather be prepared for marriage and taught house chores.
5. Religious Barriers: Certain Religious see western education as a means and form of introducing the western way of life (Garba, 2012). Most parents prefer sending their children to quranic schools rather than formal schools (Ishaq and Ali, 2014). Most religion believe that formal education introduces strange

western religion (Akubuilu and Omeje, 2012), moving girls from the respect and values instilled in them. These religious barriers towards girl education can be eradicated if religious leaders stand strongly behind the girl-child been educated (Lawan, 2017).

6. Security Barriers: Due to the traumatizing insecurity challenges in Nigeria especially in Northern states have hindered a number of girl children from attending schools. Estimating the number of out of schools children to 7million (UNESCO, 2012).

Using the example of the kidnapped Chibok girls no exact number of this girls has been determined as many have been forcefully married off, misplaced or separated from their families by this insecurity challenge. Security measures should be taken seriously and given utmost importance to ensure that these children are deprived proper education (Lawan, 2015), coupled with the recent event of missing girls also in Dapchi this proves a big hindrance to school enrollment and attendance due to insecurity in these areas (Mark, 2018).

Benefits of Girl-Child Education to National Development

A girl's education not just empowers families but communities and economies. Educating a girl-child helps nation building because once you educate a girl you educate a whole nation, through education we

tend to find sustainable ways to solve national and global problems such as health issues, economic, political etc.

Educating a girl-child not only is a basic human right but also is a big necessity in our world today because a girl would become a woman and a procreator tomorrow shaping the lives and destinies of civilization. below are relevance of educating a girl-child towards attaining sustainable national development.

1. Poverty Reduction: When a girl or woman is educated either formally or skillfully it helps them become useful to themselves, families and the society by securing paying jobs or become producers of wealth rather than becoming liabilities. This helps them becoming financially independent, develop their abilities and boost their confidence and making them self reliant (Manisha, 2016). This leads to poverty alleviation and improved standards of living causing national development or country (Ofodile, 2009).
2. Improved Health Rate: Women with proper education are able to protect both themselves and their families against various health risks through proper knowledge on the importance of immunization and proper nutrition for their children. Educating a girl-child brings about improved health and transformational benefits that can also be passed to the upcoming generations. Most importantly educated women

and girls are well informed about the risks and dangers of Hiv/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases drastically reducing the rate of diseases having a positive impact on a country's national development.

According to Shannon (2016), for each girl that is educated it reduces the rate of infant mortality by 5 percent, prevents early birth by 59 percent this is because educated girls would be well informed enough to be able to access proper medical care high mortality rates are as a result of lack of proper education.

3. High level of Political Participation: If young girls are given educational opportunities it develops their confidence level enough to want to participate and get involved in taking up leadership roles preparing them to become individuals that will make inputs and contribute meaningfully to the society thereby promoting national development.

Girl-children are functional members of any society. So therefore for a society to function as a whole everyone must play an active part, if more women and girls are educated there will be an increased rate in political involvement and participation making them change agents in their communities and society at large women are saddled

with the responsibility of instilling proper values to their children and if this is done effectively they will be a broadened and better view towards societal development,

4. Eradication of Child Marriages and Early child Births: Around the world today there is an estimate of 15million girl-children who get married before the age of 18, this hinders them from having access to or completing their education because they begin to carry out traditional roles such as child bearing and taking care of a family. Most of these girls as a result of early births suffer various reproductive complications such as IVF and if not properly handled gets complicated leading to deaths. Many families due to poverty give out their girl-children in exchange for economy value in form of bride price while others are given out in marriage as result of certain cultural and religious norms.

Research shows that if girls have access to basic education as well as secondary child marriage would drop by 64 percent therefore promoting a high level of sustainable national development.

5. Builds Tenacity and Self-Confidence: If a girl-child is educated it builds her confidence to explore and fully maximize her potentials despite all odds education also rises the level of ones self-esteem to

actualize and fulfill their dreams an educated girl will have the confidence to contribute meaningfully in her society becoming a change agents in various spheres of influence be it politics, Academia, economy, entrepreneur and health.

Proper access to education builds up a girl's tenacity pushing her to be determined and persistent attributes that can make an individual be all they desire to be.

Conclusion and Recommendations

For great development and achievements to take place in a nation the minds of its citizen must first be reformed. We need a generation of individuals whose minds are transformed and informed and this is only achievable through quality education, translating to national development all round. Girl-children are a part of a nations human resource and should be seen as an asset and if properly educated can yield so many benefits such as increased

productivity, development of skills, increased output, economic change and improved quality of life leading to long-lasting national development.

Recommendations

Arising from the above, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1 Effective implementation and enforcement of government policies and laws regarding girl child education at federal, state and local levels policies such as Compulsory education laws, education finance etc.
- 2 Eradication and Elimination of social and cultural forces that tend to shape the preference and attitude towards girls-education should be enforced.
- 3 Legal Laws towards Child rights as regards child marriage should be effectively enforced with penalties attached for states still reluctant to enforce it effectively should be implemented
- 4 Proper reform plans towards the sustainability of Girl-child education policies.

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