

Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

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Abstract

Low levels of educational attainment— especially among women—represent a very serious constraint on development in most Sub-Saharan African countries. This constraint hampers progress for individuals as well as for nations. At the individual level, education is the ultimate liberator, empowering people to make personal and social choices. This paper highlights the importance of girls' education, theoretical perspectives of girl-child education, an overview of girls' education in Nigeria and the issue of inequality in education. It further states the barriers to girls' education. The paper also proffers recommendations of what is to be done to improve girls' education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Girl-child, Education, Trends, Nigeria

Introduction

The former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said "Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family" (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019: 359). Education is no doubt a fundamental human right and one of the most powerful tools for reducing global poverty. Ensuring that all children receive the education they deserve will help overcome inequality, improve health, and promote economic growth and ensuring political stability. Education is also the ultimate equalizer, particularly in promoting greater equity for women, and for the poor and disadvantaged groups since education often is the only capital such groups can aspire to acquire. At the national level, educated citizens are the foundation for well-functioning democratic institutions, and for achieving social cohesion. Education beyond a certain level is also a necessary (but not sufficient) condition both for creating, applying and spreading the new ideas and technologies critical to achieving the economic growth required to reduce poverty and for creating the human capital among the poor needed for them to benefit from that growth. Educating girls and women is critical to achieving these benefits as well as for improvements in the areas of health, fertility and nutrition. There is wide international recognition that there is no investment more effective for achieving development goals than educating girls. And yet, reaching gender equity in school enrollment is still a major challenge in most countries, and especially in Nigeria.

One of the basic principles behind a just society is the equality of access to opportunities. It is obvious that equal access to even basic education is not universal at the worldwide level, and huge differences in educational attainment exist both within and across countries. The level of education is a fundamental factor in the development of a country. There is ample evidence that a highly educated labor force is one of the key factors in promoting a country's development. Lack



Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

of an adequate education has been one of the most important factors contributing to the persistency and increases in poverty in most countries. Just as important as the overall level of education in a country is the distribution of education between its residents. In most countries, the level of schooling for females is lower than that of males. Evidence demonstrates, furthermore, that the gender gap in education is higher in developing countries than in more developed countries. Women's education has been demonstrated to have substantial positive external effects apart from its beneficial effects on the women herself. Besides generating private returns from their participation in the labor market, women's education has strong impacts on diverse variables, such as their children's health and mortality, as well as their own fertility and reproductive health. Numerous studies have demonstrated that social returns to investing in women's education outweigh the social returns to investing in male's education (Danladi, 2021; Aremu et.al. 2017, Nyarks, 2017; Schultz, 1993; King & Hill, 1993).

Other studies have shown that it is not only important to invest in the education of men and women, but that it is important to eliminate the gender gap between them as well. There is evidence that gender inequality in education is associated with reductions in GDP per capita (Umar, et.al. 2019; King & Hill 1993). The benefits of increasing female education are therefore more than just an increase in income or in productivity. The implication, therefore, is that if female education levels are not increased to the same education levels as men, social indicators can only be achieved at much higher levels of economic growth.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has two hundred and sixteen million four hundred and seventy seven thousand, five hundred and twenty six (216.477,526) people and more than two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups (Worldometer, 2022). Although Nigeria has had a national policy on education since 1977, it has not been implemented effectively and efficiently due to rapid population growth, insufficient political will, a long period of undemocratic governance and poor management of scarce resources. Women and girls have been most affected by these negative factors (Ali, 2013). Gender inequality refers to the disparities in access to education between males and females.

In the Nigerian context, it refers to the fact that females have disproportionately low levels of access to all sub sectors of the educational system vis-à-vis their male counterparts. This is anomalous, given the fact that the distribution of the two sexes in the total population is almost equal. The 2003 Federal Ministry of Education data also indicates that 7 million of Nigeria's children of primary school age are not enrolled in school. About 4.3 million 62% of these children are girls mostly from the Northern part of Nigeria (UNICEF, 2007).

Theoretical perspectives of girl-child education

There had been several major theories that had been proposed to explain gender development. The theories differ on several important dimensions. One dimension concerns the relative emphasis placed on psychological, biological, and socio-structural determinants. Psychologically-oriented theories tend to emphasize intra-psychic processes governing gender development (Freud; Kohlberg; in Haruna, 2016). In contrast, sociological theories focus on socio-structural determinants of gender-role development and functioning (Epstein in Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019). According to biologically-oriented theories, gender differences arising from the differential biological roles played by males and females in reproduction underlie gender-role



Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

development and differentiation (Buss, 1995; Trivers, 1972; Haruna 2015a).

A second dimension concerns the nature of the transmission models. Psychological theories typically emphasize the cognitive construction of gender conceptions and styles of behaviour within the familial transmission model. This model was accorded special prominence mainly as a legacy of Freud's emphasis on adoption of gender roles within the family through the process of identification (Haruna, 2016). Behaviourist theories also have accorded prominence to parents in shaping and regulating gender-linked conduct. In theories favouring biological determinants, familial genes are posited as the transmission agent of gender differentiation across generations (Rowe, 1994). Sociologically-oriented theories emphasize the social construction of gender roles mainly at the institutional level (Lorber, 1994). Social cognitive theory of gender-role development and functioning integrates psychological and socio-structural determinants within a unified conceptual framework (Bandura in Haruna, 2017). In this perspective, gender conceptions and role behaviour are the products of a broad network of social influences operating both familiarly and in the many societal systems encountered in everyday life. Thus, it favors a multifaceted social transmission model rather than mainly a familial transmission model (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019).

The third dimension concerns the temporal scope of the theoretical analyses. Most psychological theories treat gender development as primarily a phenomenon of early childhood rather than one that operates throughout the life course. However, rules of gender-role conduct vary to some degree across social contexts and at different periods in life. Moreover, socio-cultural and technological changes necessitate revision of pre-existing conceptions of what constitutes appropriate gender conduct. Gender role development and functioning are not confined to childhood but are negotiated throughout the life course. While most theories of gender development have been concerned with the early years of development (Freud; Kohlberg; in Haruna, 2016) or have focused on adults (Deaux & Major in Haruna 2016), socio-cognitive theory takes a life-course perspective. Therefore, in the following sections, the analysis of the socio-cognitive determinants of gender orientations will span the entire age range. Nor is the theory restricted predominantly to cognitive or social factors. Rather cognitive, social, affective and motivational processes are all accorded prominence. Before presenting the socio-cognitive perspective on gender development, the main psychological, biological and sociological perspectives on gender differentiation are briefly reviewed.

Cognitive Developmental Theory of gender identity

According to cognitive developmental theory, gender identity is postulated as the basic organizer and regulator of children's gender learning (Kohlberg, 1966). Children develop the stereotypic conceptions of gender from what they see and hear around them. Once they achieve gender constancy – the belief that their own gender is fixed and irreversible – they positively value their gender identity and seek to behave only in ways that are congruent with that conception. Cognitive consistency is gratifying, so individuals attempt to behave in ways that are consistent with their self-conception. Kohlberg posited the following cognitive processes that create and maintain such consistency: "I am a boy, therefore I want to do boy things, therefore the opportunity to do boy things (and to gain approval for doing them) is rewarding" (Kohlberg, in Haruna, 2015b). In this view, much of children's conduct is designed to confirm their gender



Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

identity. Once children establish knowledge of their own gender, the reciprocal interplay between one's behaviour (acting like a girl) and thoughts (I am a girl) leads to a stable gender identity, or in cognitive-developmental theory terms, the child achieves gender constancy (Haruna & Gambo, 2018).

Kohlberg defined gender constancy as the realization that one's sex is a permanent attribute tied to underlying biological properties and does not depend on superficial characteristics such as hair length, style of clothing, or choice of play activities (Kohlberg, in Haruna, 2015a). Development of gender constancy is not an all or none phenomenon. Three discrete levels of gender understanding comprise gender constancy (Slaby & Frey in Haruna, 2015a). From least to most mature forms of gender understanding, these are designated as the gender identity, stability, and consistency components of gender constancy. "Gender identity" requires the simple ability to label oneself as a boy or girl and others as a boy, girl, man, or woman. "Gender stability" is the recognition that gender remains constant over time -- that is, one's sex is the same now as it was when one was a baby and will remain the same in adulthood. The final component of gender constancy, "gender consistency", is mastered at about age six or seven years (Haruna & Gambo, 2018). The child now possesses the added knowledge that gender is invariant despite changes in appearance, dress or activity. Children are not expected to adopt gender-typed behaviours consistently until after they regard themselves unalterably as a boy or a girl, which usually is not achieved until about six years of age (Haruna & Gambo, 2018).

Although Kohlberg's theory attracted much attention over the decades, its main tenets have not fared well empirically. Studies generally have failed to corroborate the link between children's attainment of gender constancy and their gender-linked conduct (Huston, 1983). Long before children have attained gender constancy, they prefer to play with toys traditionally associated with their gender (Haruna & Gambo, 2018), to model their behaviour after same-sex models (Bussey & Bandura in Haruna 2015b).

The findings of other lines of research similarly fail to support the major tenets of this theory. Although stable gender constancy is not attained until about six years of age, 2-year olds perform remarkably well in sorting pictures of feminine and masculine toys, articles of clothing, tools and appliances in terms of their typical gender relatedness (Thompson, 1975). Children's ability to classify their own and others' sex and some knowledge of gender-role stereotypes is all that is necessary for much early gender typing to occur. These categorization skills are evident in most three- and four-year olds. Clearly, gender constancy is not a prerequisite for gender development. Factors other than gender constancy govern children's gender-linked conduct.

Overview of Girls Education in Nigeria

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 remainders were exclusively for boys (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019). 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 in 1879, St Anne's School, Molete, Ibadan in 1896, St. Theresa's College, Ibadan in 1932, Queens College, Lagos in 1927,



Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

Holy Rosary College, Enugu in 1935, Anglican Girls Grammar School, Lagos in 1945, Queen Amina College and Alhuda College, Kano (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019). 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.

In the 1960s, when most African states began to gain their political independence, there was considerable gender disparity in education. Girls' enrollment figures were very low throughout the continent. In May 1961, the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and UNESCO's educational plans for Nigeria were announced in a conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A target was set: to achieve 100% universal primary education in Nigeria by the year 1980 (UNESCO, 1989).

The implementation in the 1970s of the free and compulsory Universal Primary Education (UPE) was in line with this UN Plan. Ever since, UNICEF and UNESCO and many other organizations have sponsored, research and conferences within Nigeria regarding the education of girls. Up until the 1970s, considerably more boys than girls participated in education in Nigeria. According to one Nigerian Historian Kitetu, the native traditions' philosophy was that a woman's place is at home and this kept many girls away from education. However, with the government's intervention and public awakening, parents began to send and keep their girl children in school (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019). Consequently, women's involvement became more visible.

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 (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019). 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. 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 (Ekpiwre & Haruna, 2019).

Importance of Girls' Education in Nigeria

The importance of girls' education cannot be overemphasized. Girls' education and the promotion of gender equality in education are vital to development. Policies and actions that do not address gender disparities miss critical development opportunities. There are several compelling benefits associated with girls' education, which include the reduction of child and maternal mortality, improvement of child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women's domestic role and their political participation, improvement of the economic productivity and growth, and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and exploitation. According to Ali (2013), girls' education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, yielding both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families, and society at large by:

1. Reducing women's fertility rates. Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and childbearing, and have fewer and healthier babies than women with no formal education. It is estimated that one year of female schooling reduces fertility by 10 percent. The effect is particularly pronounced for secondary schooling (Nmadu et.al. 2020).



Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

2. Lowering infant and child mortality rates. Women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished (Nmadu, et.al. 2020).
3. Lowering maternal mortality rates. Women with formal education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices, are less likely to become pregnant at a very young age, tend to have fewer, better-spaced pregnancies, and seek pre- and post-natal care. It is estimated that an additional year of schooling for 1,000 women helps prevent two maternal deaths (Nmadu, et.al. 2020).
4. Protecting against HIV/AIDS infection. Girls' education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. It slows and reduces the spread of HIV/AIDS by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, and work outside the home, as well as conveying greater information about the disease and how to prevent it (Nmadu, et.al. 2020).
5. Increasing women's labor force participation rates and earnings. Education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and increase productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and society (Nmadu, et.al. 2020).
6. Creating intergenerational education benefits. Mothers' education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities. A mother with a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school. In many countries each additional year of formal education completed by a mother translates into her children remaining in school for an additional one-third to one-half year (Nmadu, et.al. 2020).

Barriers to girls' education in Nigeria

In 1948, the United Nations ratified the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, proclaiming that all children have the right to a basic education. Yet, despite this pledge, over 90 million children still do not attend primary school (UNICEF, 2004). Some of the most common barriers include:

1. School fees/ Poor economic background: Many families have poor economic background. They could not afford to pay school fees for their children. When money is scarce, parents tend to place greater value on educating their sons, who are assumed to be future breadwinners of the family
2. Child labor: Girls are often expected to contribute more than boys to household chores and upkeep. Making the high cost of enrolling girls in school combined with the loss of valuable help at home not worth it to many poor families (UNICEF, 2002).
3. Lack of awareness compounded by religious misconception.
4. Poor supply of teachers, especially female teachers and girl friendly learning environment. Scarcity of female teachers, lack of bathroom facilities and tolerance of sexual harassment in schools make many parents reluctant to send their daughters to school (UNICEF, 2001).
5. The ability to attend school is only the first challenge; quality of school is also important. In some places, there may be as many as 100-150 children in each classroom and not enough teachers or supplies.

Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

6. Concerns about safety also keep girls at home, especially in rural areas, where they may have to walk up to 10 miles just to reach their classrooms
7. Many schools lack essential facilities and materials including toilets and water point.

Where we stand in the Education of Girls/women:

According to Ayanniyi in Ali (2013) Literacy is one of the first steps in a process of enabling women to take control over their own lives, participate in an equal basis in society and eventually free themselves from exploitation and patriarchal oppression. In addition to social justice, human rights and equality, there are many other human, social and economic reasons to urge government and organizations to take special actions to make education for women and girls a priority objective.

Sixty percent of the world's approximately one billion illiterate people are females that is an estimate of 56.1 million (UNESCO in Ali, 2013). The female literacy rate in Nigeria according to Ndu (1991) in Hamalai (1999) was estimated 39.5 % which when compared with 62.3% for males is relatively low. This means that 26.23 million of the estimated 43.9 million women in Nigeria are illiterate. The 2003 Federal Ministry of Education data also indicates that 7 million of Nigeria's children of primary school age are not enrolled in school. About 4.3 million 62% of these children are girls mostly from the Northern part of Nigeria. This high illiteracy rate among women in Nigeria is a consequence of historical, social and cultural antecedents such as sex stereotyping, forced and early marriages.

Conclusion

Education is a fundamental right that cannot be forfeited. It is a litmus test for the individual to assess their government's commitments to fundamental rights, as well as those of the international community. The right to education is unique in that it empowers the individual to exercise other civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, attaining a life of dignity, while ensuring a brighter future for all, free from want and from fear. It is obvious that the implementation of the above will not only make education more accessible to girls but will ensure full retention and completion, forming the grounds for a further promotion of children's cognitive, creative and emotional development.

Recommendations

1. Primary education should be inclusive and accessible to all, in law as well as in fact. No provider of public education should discriminate on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, language, religion, opinion, disability, or social and economic status.
2. Federal and State governments should make education for women free at all levels, because the current economic returns on investment in education has made it unattractive and difficult for parents to invest in girls' education. This could be done through special scholarships and bursary schemes for girls and removal of hidden charges in school.
3. State governments should establish more day secondary schools.
4. Government and NGOs should mobilize parents to send their daughters to school and community leaders to assist government in raising the level of female enrolment. The mass

Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

media can serve as veritable tool for this campaign and it should be continuous lasting many years until the goal is achieved

5. The quota for admission of female into our tertiary institutions should be raised.
6. Federal, State governments and NGOs should introduce an incentive to female teachers to be able to have more women going into the teaching profession so they can serve as role models to girls.

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Girl-Child Education and its Trend in Nigeria ... (Ali, 2022)

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