

Non-Formal Education and the Girl-Child in Northern Nigeria: Issues and Strategies

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Abstract

Girl child education is highly upheld not only in Nigeria but in all parts of the world. This is because statistically, the bulk of the world illiterates are women, and this is also applicable to northern Nigeria, where 65% of the children in school are boys, while majority of the girls are out of school. This paper examines the factors affecting girls' education in northern Nigeria. It also explores the benefits of the girls education to the society. It reviews international literature on the matter and relates it to the situation in northern Nigeria. It concludes that even though efforts were made by the various governments of the world and Nigeria in particular to ensure ample educational opportunities for all, yet, a gap still exists. Further more in the North; the situation undeniably affects generational upbringing and moral training. Based on this situation, seven suggestions were made for a collaborative move between the formal and the non-formal sector to eradicate illiteracy in our society.

Keywords: Non-Formal Education, Panacea, Reducing, Illiteracy Rate, Girl-Child, Northern Nigeria

1. Introduction

The introduction of the girl-child education programme by the government of Federal Republic of Nigeria emerged as a result of the increasing in level of illiteracy among the developing countries, particularly Nigeria. This however, made it a thing of concern to persons concerned with development in order to involve the female folk in the process of national development. Considering that Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa, it shares same experience in the high number of women illiterates particularly in the northern part of the country where many socio-economic and cultural practices militate against women development. Successive governments in Nigeria developed several policies and programmes to ensure that girls in Nigeria are given the education every Nigerian ought to get to make them functional in the society. This is however, in line with the child's right act. The act as contained in UNICEF (1999) further stressed that, "every child (male or female) is entitled to receive free and compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education based on individual ability". Historical development of the girl-child education in Nigeria has been that, the female child had all through been relegated to the background in the area of school enrolment, attendance, completion and transition to higher school especially in the northern part of Nigeria (Mangvwat and Abama 1999). Nigeria is lagging in the fight against illiteracy when compared with countries such as Cuba, Norway, Poland, Holy See, Kazhstan, Georgia, Barbados, to mention but a few who have attained 100% literacy rate. Nigeria was listed among the E-9 nations who are likely not to meet the MDGs. One of the indicators used for the list was literacy rate of the country. Other nations in the list are Indonesia which had 90% literacy rate, Brazil with 89%, China has 92% and Nigeria is at 56.9% literacy rate (UNESCO 2012).

The Girl-Child Education

The girl-child as defined by UNICEF is a female human being below the age of 18. The word education on the other hand could be given different meanings by different authors in different ways depending on their purpose of defining the term or their view point of the term. It was defined by Castle in Adeyemo (1975) as what happened to us from the day we were born to the day we die. Farrant defines it as the process of learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community to which one belongs. Alban Winter puts it as the development of the physical, mental and spiritual capacities of the individual to enable him grow according to God's purpose and to be of service to his people. R.S. Peters in Adeyemo (1975) said education is the all round development of a person - physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. In the context of this paper, Education is any learning experience organized for students under the age of 18 in order to make them useful members of the society to which they belong. Girl child education programme has been viewed by different people interested in the programme in different ways. For instance, the ministry of education is likely to see it as the formal school programme for all girls in school to ensure they obtain the best learning experience. Those from the non-formal sector see it as an educational programme designed for out of school girls to help them make up their missed chance of schooling. Some see it as a programme aimed at giving out of school girls vocational skills to help them break through economically. While on some cases these girls are given the literacy skills only as it provides them with a means for further learning. In summary girl-child education refers to

educational programme which provides ample opportunities for girls to enroll, attend and complete their education without any sense of discrimination.

Girl-child education in Nigeria: the Journey so far

It could be recalled that, the Federal Government through the Federal Ministry of Education, forwarded a proposal to the National Council on Education (NCE) on female education. The meeting which was held in Kaduna in 1986 endorsed the following policy objectives:

- Provision of more educational opportunities for girls from primary schools to tertiary levels.
- Creating awareness among all citizens of the fact that educational opportunities exist irrespective of gender, age, location, creed or status and therefore be made available.
- Re-orienting the attitudes of all females irrespective of age towards education.
- Provision of basic literacy skills acquisition for illiterate females (girls inclusive) and early school leavers through skills such as sewing, cooking, baking, typing, knitting, crocheting, tatting, tie/dye, batik and subsistence agriculture.
- Awakenning the consciousness of all women to the need for the development of a positive self image.
- Educating parents and general public so as to bring about a change in attitudes towards women education programmes.
- Promoting female education in the fields of science and technology and mathematics.

In the same year a blue print was developed, a campaign was launched, special schools for girls were opened, efforts were made which discouraged girl-child withdrawal from schools. In spite of all these in those years girls enrolment had never exceeded 45% of the total enrolment while female populace was then higher than males at all categories (Mangwat and Abama 1999). The writer of this paper is of the opinion that, female enrolment into school was generally low at primary level and was worst at secondary and tertiary levels. The higher the level of schooling girls go; the narrower their chance of schooling.

The Federal Government has expressed its commitment to the fight illiteracy among its populace (girls inclusive) in many instances. For instance it was a signatory to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's Universal declaration of human right after the World War II in 1948, in which education was made a right to every human regardless of sex, race and religion. Other commitments are during the 1966 international covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1981 African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Copenhagen convention on equal opportunities in 1995, the Education For All in Jomtein (2000) and now the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All of these expressed the intention of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to provide education to all citizens without any form of discrimination. The launching of the girl child school programme in Northern Nigeria to make education accessible and affordable to the less privilege by the Jonathan administration are special attention put by his administration to reduce illiteracy in the northern part of the country which is generally said to be backward educationally. Perhaps this is why the Honourable Minister of Education said "the Federal Government has decided to give priority attention to the education of the girl-child" while decrying the state of illiteracy in the country (the Nigerian Tribune 14th September 2011). Yet, despite all efforts so far put into the education for all programme, more boys are enrolled into primary schools than females. Sixty five percent (65%) of primary school pupils are boys as at 2009 (trading economics.com 2009). Onyuku, (2011) added to this that, the girls who are enrolled into primary schools in Nigeria less than 45% of them make it to secondary school. She explained that, girls' enrolment was put in the same year at 59.6%. In giving reasons why the girl child does not get the needed attention, James (2012) blamed it on the failure of the education sector as under funding and wastage to have bedeviled the education sector. He said that, Nigeria has not been funding the education sector as should be. The UNDP has suggested allocation of 26% of nations' national budget to the education sector the idea which is not applied. He lamented on the allocation 10% (# 499 billion) of the national budget to education in 2012 budget of Nigeria, the which he said is highly inadequate especially when compared with what was allocated to the presidency and the national assembly (#193 billion), this is even an improvement on the previous allocations. The national assembly was given #150 billion, and the presidency given #43 billion respectively. If 193 billion naira is allocated to cater for the needs of 500 Nigerians what could #499 billion do to the vast number of students in various levels of educations in Nigeria? To crown it all, the allocation of #921.9 billion naira to security has left education and health sector with #499 billion and #282 billion respectively. No wonder Nigeria was ranked by UNDP in 2011 as 142nd in the world, the ranking placed Nigeria behind less developed countries like Algeria, Malawi, Iraq, etc. the role funding and budget implementation must not be an over emphasis in the stride to reducing illiteracy which if addressed so many social vices in our society will die naturally. Being one of the E-9 countries there is need to put in the best we can to reduce the illiteracy level by 2015 which may not due to the present phase if it is continue with the strategy in use. This is because it was understood that, if girls are educated they are to form the adult illiterates of tomorrow.

Benefits of girls' education to the society

The popular adage “if you educate a man you educate an individual but you educate a woman you educate a nation” sound very relevant in this context. Literacy has the power to provide opportunity to acquire the essential skills, knowledge and attitudes to move the nation forward. This assertion imply that, the education given to female child who eventually grows up into a woman at marriage has a lot of benefits to not only her person but the nation to which she is a citizen. Perhaps this is why voices have been made for the female folks by civil society organizations, Non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies and international organizations at different times to ensure that the girl-child is given the space to acquire qualitative education to help deliver her expected services well. The benefits of the education of girls can be seen through the following areas:

1. Child Training

The woman (who is the adult person of the girl-child) lives to train every child she is blessed with. In fact may be this is why the first language the child speaks is called “mother tongue”. She is much closer to her children than the father/ husband is, hence most if not all of the initial training of the child comes through her. Thus, as a naturally born teacher, if only she has some forms of advanced knowledge it will help a lot in making her a good worker. Just reflect your society/ community of your residence, compare how well illiterate wives/mothers conduct their child training with that of literate wives/mothers, you are likely to find a significant difference. Often, children of educated homes are good in behaviour and observance of community rules and regulations.

2. Supporting Child Education:

Mothers who went through formal education no matter the level, have the tendency to pick interest in the education of their children. They often support them to carry out their home work. Such homes blessed with schooled mothers tend to produce/influence the educational performances of their children in schools.

3. Health and Sanitation:

Health is said to be wealth, many of the sicknesses affecting members of the families are said to be preventable diseases if good hygiene and sanitation of the environment and food we eat is maintained. They often go through practical hygiene and sanitation practices in school and can practice same at home.

4. Moral Training:

Most women who went through formal school serve as a role model and a potential moral instructor due to the wealth of knowledge and practical experiences acquired during their school days. The increasing moral decadence in Nigeria and northern Nigeria in particular could be related to poor moral training which most homes in the northern region could not give their children may be due to large size of the families. The moral training at the home front is majorly carried out by the mother who is closer and spends much time with their children. Unfortunately this duty if carried out by unschooled mothers may lack the technical knowhow on how to raise these children in the way of the lord and taste of the society. Today you hear men blame their wives when children misbehave not minding the fact she hasn't enough knowledge on how to train the children, beside she is overloaded with so many domestic duties. In some other cases the underage girls given out in marriage ended up being a mother without adequate knowledge of home keeping, she came in as wife from hawking and now a mother, apart from breast feeding she knows no other expected duty than cooking.

5. Economic Empowerment

Education has a lot of relevance to an individual's economic growth and development. This is likely the reason for men having higher economic status than women. Women who are educated are more likely to be employed or become employers, this has a lot of relevance to national economic development as it provides means of livelihood to other members of the society. The income gotten by the woman is likely to be used for taking care of the family needs. This case is not feasible with those who didn't go to school. Women who go school are generally industrious and have good initiatives and management skills which help in good resource management in the house. Often time the economic activity an educated woman engages in tend to yield successfully and consequently impact on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. Today we have women in a agriculture a profession thought to belong only to men before now.

Factors Militating against Girls' Enrolment and Completion in Schools

Although it is affirmatively stated in the world summit in Copenhagen in the year 1995 that, “we will ensure full and equal access to education for girls and women recognizing that investing in women's education is the key element in achieving social equality, higher productivity and social returns in terms of health, lower infant mortality and the reduced need for high fertility” (Mangvwat and Abama 1999). Unfortunately despite this commitment to female education and girls in particular, there seem to be constraints militating against girl's educational pursuit in Nigeria and northern region in particular. It is commonly said that for whatever happenings on earth there is an underlying reason. These are internal or external reasons. It was expressed by UNICEF (2005) that children below 15 years covered 45% of the country's population in Nigeria. The same

population does not attend primary school with northern region recording lowest attendance rate girls especially. The same source said, about 4.7 million children of primary school age are still not in school. Observations show that a lot of times the girls who enrolled in to schools dropped out without completing. These categories of children are likely to form the illiterate adults of tomorrow. This makes the stride for reducing if not eradicating illiteracy in the country a continuous task which may have no end. UNICEF Nigeria in 2005 reported that retention of children in schools is a serious challenge to the issue ensuring access to education by all children. It stated that, 54% of pupils enrolled into primary school to Junior Secondary School, leaving out 46% and the ratio of enrollment by gender is 1 girl to 2 boys and 1 girl to 3 boys in some states. All these happened due to some underlying factors militating access to education by the girl-child in our communities.

The UNICEF (2005) identified cultural biasness as a militating factor to children's enrollment and girls especially in Nigeria. The organization pointed out that most of the parents in the north do not send their children to school especially girls, and prefer sending them to Qur'anic schools rather than formal schools. An element of religion seem to be coming into play in this matrix where a religious education alone is preferred for their children to formal school which might have been seen as 'western'. Here if an effort is not made to redress this mind set, the trend of girls withdral and non- enrolment of girls will be a continuous happening.

Maangyvat and Abama (1999) identified some number of factors militating against girls' enrolment to include the following:

1. Child labour
2. Economic hardship/ financial constraint.
3. Early marriages for girls
4. Historical and community factors
5. High opportunity cost
6. Societal perception of female roles
7. School distance
8. Lack of community support.

Some factors affecting girl-child education includes cultural biasness. This was identified by UNICEF (2005) as a factor affecting pupils' enrolment and girls especially. This was seen to be more enormous in the north. The organization pointed out that most parents do not send their children to especially girls to school and prefer to send them to Qur'anic schools rather than formal schools. Here an element of religion seems to be coming into play in this matrix where a religious education is preferred at the expense of formal school. This issue has been and can yet be taken care of by the recent UNICEF Qur'anic integrated school introduced in northern Nigeria and the recent effort of Federal government of Nigeria which introduced the integration of western education into Qur'anic education to take care of the apparent suspicious attitude of those running away from the formal school system.

Garba (2003) found that some other factors why girls are not sent to school are:

At the home front; fear, ignorance and belief that education can make girls rebellious and difficult to handle. That can be proud and too self- reliant for comfort. He added that, high rate of parent's illiteracy denies them economic growth making sponsorship of girls education a less preference to that of boys in our northern region. Enjoying the benefits of hawking, which is usually done by girls as a simple way of getting money to fund marriages and other domestic financial challenges constitute factors affecting girl-child educational opportunities in Nigeria. He looked into government side and pointed to what he called lack of good political will, political instability, lack of gender polity strategy, weak planning poor implementation of the programme, inadequate monitoring and evaluation of the programme, cost of implementation of the curriculum and opportunity cost of attending the school by these girls and their family.

The role of Adult and Non-Formal Education in widening the educational opportunities of girls in northern Nigeria

The issue of seeking to widen the educational opportunities of girls in Nigeria is of paramount importance to the Nigerian state especially, if this is viewed from the perspectives of the overall goals of education in Nigeria. According to the National Policy on Education, the goals of education are:

- i) Physical efficiency
- ii) Intellectual efficiency.
- iii) Moral and spiritual efficiency.

In the context of Adult and Non-Formal Education, it was spelt out in section 51 of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria (1987) that the mandate of youth education outside the school system belong to this institution. While in section 52, sub-section (b) which states to provide functional and remedial education for those young people who pre-maturely dropped out of the formal school system. It is clear that, cultural, sociological conditions, and each will also contain basic civics instruction aimed at generating qualities of good citizenship and active involvement by all in the national development process (Federal Republic of Nigeria

2004).

If these are what our Nigerian education system seeks to achieve then, the task of widening the opportunities for girls who are charge so much social responsibilities for our onward change greater height. What can government do to help widen the educational opportunities in Northern Nigeria towards harvesting these stated goals for stable, virile and balanced nation state for growth and development? It was posited by Mangvwat and Abama (1999) that if the government and the entire populace want to widen girls' educational opportunities the following should be looked into:

1. Lowering direct cost of education for girls by ensuring free education in reality.
2. expanding the number of school places and single sex schools to cater for those in rural areas who may not afford to live out of their homes due to economic hard ship.
3. child minding/care should not be placed hard on the girls in the family to help them read at home.
4. community participation in school management
5. paying allowances to girls from less privilege homes in schools.

Non-Formal Education as a Panacea for Reducing Illiteracy Rate Among the Female Gender in Northern Nigeria

Nigeria had a history in the stride for equalizing educational opportunities between boys and girls, the effort which seems abortive as there is still high level of illiteracy among females compared to that of males in the country. This paper would like to suggest that, since the previous effort seems not to yield much, perhaps the Non-Formal sector could perform wonderfully by embracing this as its programme using the NFE strategy to help reduce illiteracy rate among females and in Nigeria in particular. In the 'D' Field some times in the last decade a syllabi was designed by UNICEF 'D' field to facilitate the process of getting to the girls in the north towards reducing illiteracy and making them productive members of the society. The syllabi/curriculum according to Greg (2000) has some stated objectives which are:

- develop in learners the skills of Reading, Writing and Numeracy in both English language and the language of the immediate environment.
- Equip learners with home management and life skills.
- Inculcate in learners, good citizenship ideals.
- Give learners vocational skills.
- Equip learners with necessary knowledge for mainstreaming into the formal education system.
- Equip learners with the skills to understand and analyze prevailing gender issues that negatively affect girls development.

The Outlook of the Girl-Child Curriculum

This paper would like present the curriculum to be in two major phases.

Stage one: *The beginners' education.* In line with what was presented by Greg (2000) this stage will last for two years, with six main subjects to include immediate language of the environment, English language, numeracy, life skills, vocational education and citizenship education. This content was recommended to be suitable for girl within the age grade of 8-18 years as they are considered to be within the school age.

Stage two: *Post beginner's education:* This is meant to prepare these learners for onward transition to secondary schools or institutes as the need may be. This should last for two years, the subjects to be taught includes English language, mathematics, home economics, integrated science, environmental education and social studies.

Methodology:

The suitable methodology to use in the implementation of this programme is the combination of Right-based Approach and Participatory strategy in the implementation of the programme. This will be carried out by professionals in adult education at the grass root level (as instructors).

Summary and Conclusion:

Girl-child education is a matter of concern to all developmentalists. It's been decades of world conferences and national policies towards widening the educational opportunities of Nigerian girls and northern region in particular. This paper call for an urgent fallback on adult and non-formal education to help rescue our nation by reducing the existing and possibly increasing trend of illiteracy in the country which up to now is at 43.1%. A number which is very large to be neglected to illiteracy; this becomes necessary as decades were taken labouring in the formal sector towards securing girl-child education yet the result is not very encouraging. The Jordan experience could be good to share at this point, Jordon is a country in the Middle East, it had 67.6% of its populace in illiteracy in 1961. They made a commitment to the international conventions (as Nigeria had) planned and stick to their plans and achieved reduction of illiteracy rate to 6.7% in 2011. It was obtained due to the kind of strategy used by the collaborative effort of both formal and the non- formal sector. Today the country hoped to achieve some level of reduction by 2015 and 0% illiteracy rate by 2020 (World Literacy Foundation, 2012). The popular Hausa adage "Hanu daya bata daukan jinka" (meaning one person cannot lift a roof to the

top of a house) becomes relevant here. A call for partnership with the formal school system in the stride for widening the educational opportunities of girls by bringing not only education to their door step; but giving them what they need at their convenience time. This is the power of the Non-Formal Education approach to out of school youths and adults for national development.

Suggestions:

The following suggestions were made by this paper to increase girls' educational opportunities in Northern Nigeria.

1. an urgent plan of a convenient and needful curriculum should be made by adult and Non-Formal Education sector to embrace the challenge of reducing illiteracy among girls.
2. a mass campaign on and for the girl- child education should be planned and conducted in the north towards community sensitization and mobilization.
3. adequate funding as with the case in formal sector should be ensured. Alongside budget allocation, budget implementation and budget tracking should be watched and carried out by all stake holders.
4. the programme should be well spread around rural areas where most of the out of school girls are located.
5. there should be a collaborative approach with community and religious leaders of the area, if possible they should take the lead in the campaign. funding of the literacy centers and supply of adequate learning/instructional materials.
6. payment of allowances to girls in the literacy centers to cover up for their much establishment of literacy centers across communities in northern part of Nigeria to cater for the out of school girls.
7. forgone opportunities cost of being in the center.

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