

Financial and Curricular Factors for Gender Equality and Human Resource Development in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

A growing concern about the Nigerian educational system is that of gender equity. Research has established the fact that girls/women are marginalized educationally and economically. Poverty and gender discrimination against the girl-child have been found to be the root causes of girl's/women's marginalization. This paper therefore sought to ascertain the strategies that can be taken to engender gender equality in secondary schools. The study was carried out in Awka local government area ((L.G.A) of Anambra state, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 1050 teachers in fifteen public secondary schools in Awka L.G.A. The sample size was 150 teachers randomly selected from the schools. The instrument for data collection was researcher constructed questionnaire made up of thirteen items, which was validated by experts in gender studies and measurement and evaluation from Ebonyi state University, Abakaliki. The instrument was subjected to reliability test using test retest method. It was administered to 20 secondary school teachers outside the area of study twice in an interval of two weeks. Using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, reliability coefficient of .87 was obtained. The data got were analyzed using mean scores. The findings showed that (1) Offering free` education to girls in secondary schools will help to achieve gender equality by: making more girls` enroll in secondary schools; offering more girls opportunity to study science-based subjects; improve girls self-concept, realize and develop their talents. (2) Providing entrepreneurship education for the girl-child will help to close gender gap by: equipping the girls with saleable skills, making them employers of labour, making them contribute to nation building, making them role models to other girls; and making them develop the skill of creativity. Based on the findings recommendations made include: (1) that` government should provide free and compulsory education to girls in secondary schools; (2) Non-governmental organizations should partner with government to offer financial assistance to girls in secondary schools; and (3) Entrepreneurship education should be incorporated into girls education in secondary schools.

Keywords: Curriculum, Gender, Equality and Human Resource Development

Introduction

There is phenomenal disparity between the male child and the girl-child at home and in school with the girl-child on the disadvantaged position. The boy child enjoys preference over the girl-child in Africa and Nigeria particular. He is much valued and adored by the parents and relatives. The birth of a male child in the family is always heralded by shouts of joy and lots of celebrations. The boy child is usually surrounded by lots of care, love and provisions. The patriarchal nature of most African culture place more values on the male child than the female child. Patriarchy spares the male-child of domestic chores, gives him right to go to school, inherit and manage family property; and take up income-earning jobs outside the home (Mbah, 2010). BBC News (2006) reported that African patriarchal societal view point favours boys over` girls because boys maintain the family lineage.

On the other hand, the birth of the girl child is often not welcomed. The girl child is tolerated rather than accepted as part of the family. According to Akubue (2001), in most African society, women are regarded as second rate citizens, and the delivery of a girl is greeted with mourning. The girl-child bears the burden of house chores and with little or no provisions for her welfare. Oftentimes, she is denied access to basic necessities of life including education. The male child is sent to school at her expense. The discrimination against the girl-child which starts from the home stretches to the school resulting in great disparity between her and her male counterpart. UNICEF (2003) reported that in Sub-Sahara Africa, the number of girls out of school each year had risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. Statistics and research have shown that there is more boys` enrolment in secondary school than girls in Nigeria (FME, 2006; Tor-Anyiin and Abekhale, 2009; and Offorma, 2010).

According to Onuigbo (2010), the culture of most Nigerian communities has given more privileges to the male child over his female counterpart so much that when the choice is to be made between sending the male child or the female child to school, the male child is favoured. Reason for such choice being that the female child will eventually be married off to another family, and that the main role of a woman is that of domesticity. Eze (2008) expressed shock that up till 21 century, girls are still being made to live in their shadows, denied education, and other rights as well as socially exploited. According to Shirley, Randel, and Gergel (2010), gender disparity intensify in secondary education, as cultural attitudes reinforce the norm that girls do not need

further education after primary education. They stressed that even when girls are provided with the opportunity to pursue secondary education; their preparation level is far below that of boys, due to unequal treatment during primary school, and lack of parental support. Gender disparity is limiting Nigeria's ability to fully develop her human resources since a large number of girls are still being denied access to quality education.

The Jomtein conference of 1990 launched the education for All (EFA) initiatives, which aimed at getting children into school within 10 years of age, and improving the quality of education for girls and women. Nigeria embarked on Universal Basic Education in a bid to meet the Millennium Development Goal. Achievement of UBE could be a mirage if the low enrolment of girls in secondary school should persist. Related to the problem of low enrolment of girls in secondary school, is the issue of the quality of education she receives. There is aspersion that the quality and quantity of education the girl child receives could help her adapt to the knowledge-base economy of the 21st century. Many factors are attributed to why girls between the ages of 10 and 16 years, who by the educational system in Nigeria should be in secondary schools, are lagging behind thereby creating gender disparity in education. Chief among the factors is poverty (Eze 2008, and Nkwota, 2011). Quality education is the only sure way the country can generate capable manpower needed for industrialization and sustainable development in this era of globalization. Family economy affects girls' education to a great extent in Nigeria. When a family is economically buoyant, many parents are willing to send their children, both males and females to school. When the family economy is poor, some parents prefer to send only their male children to school at the expense of the female children (Babangida, 1990). This is due to the fact that some parents believe that their female children belong to other families since they will eventually get married. Hence, sending the girls to school will not promote the economic status of the family they are born into, but rather promote the economy of their husbands' families.

Another factor which negatively affects girls' education leading to gender disparity educationally and economically is gender stereotyped education. There is general perception that art subjects are for girls while science subjects are for boys. According to Momsen (1991), in most parts of the world, women are channeled into liberal arts and social science subjects, while men are encouraged to take up the hard core sciences. Momsen's observation is supported by Ezeliora (2002:76) who stated that "from earlier times, boys received more encouragement and support to study science while girls were not made to be in touch with the real science subjects. Gender stereotyped education has limited women's job opportunities in contemporary world where science and technology have take over every sphere of life. Consequent on this, women have become economically backward.

The educational and economic backwardness of the women have limited their ability to contribute meaningfully to national development in spite of the fact that women have always being the pioneers of development in their families, communities and countries. According to Egbo (2005: 28)

For Nigeria to take it's place as a nation state to be reckoned with both at home and abroad, the educational system has to address in a more profound way, issue of those who have been marginalized by the educational system in the past. This involves promoting education for all, particularly for groups such as women who remain at the sidelines of the nation's development endeavours.

It is therefore imperative to promote the education of the girl children who are the women and that form the human resource indispensable for nation building. The government therefore needs to give financial assistance to girl-child education as well as make policies that will lead to the improvement of the quality of education the girl-child receives in other to close the gender gap. This study therefore sought to determine the strategies for achieving gender equality in girl-child education in secondary school.

Two research questions guided the study. These are:

1. What are the ways provisions of free education for the girl-child can help to achieve gender equality in secondary education?
2. What are the ways provisions of entrepreneurship education for the` girl-child help to achieve gender equality?

Method

The study adopted a survey research design since it involved eliciting information from respondents. The study was carried out in Awka South Local Government Area (LGA), Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study was made up of 1050 teachers in 15 public secondary schools in Awka Local Government Area of Anambra state. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw 150 teachers from ten secondary schools. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-made questionnaire. It is made up of two sections – Section A and B. Section A contains personal data of the respondents while section B has 13 items related to strategies for gender equality in girl-child education. The items in Section B were structured on a 4-point scale of strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2, and strongly Disagree (SD) The instrument was subjected to

both content and face validation using two experts in Measurement and Evaluation and two experts in Gender studies. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using test retest method. The instrument was administered to 20 secondary school teachers twice, with an interval of two weeks in Abakaliki urban of Ebonyi State. The two results were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient. Co-efficient of 0.87 was obtained. Mean was used to analyze the data collected.

Result

Table 1: Mean ratings on how free education will help to achieve gender equality in secondary school

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | FX | \bar{X} | Decision |
|-----|---|-----|-----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| 1. | More girls will enroll in secondary schools if offered free education | 280 | 120 | 60 | 10 | 470 | 3.13 | Agree |
| 2. | There will be more girls taking science subjects which have been dominated by boys | 220 | 120 | 90 | 25 | 455 | 3.03 | Agree |
| 3. | Free education for the girl-child will help to improve her self-concept | 300 | 75 | 20 | 40 | 435 | 2.9 | Agree |
| 4. | Free education for the girl-child gives her opportunity to realize and develop her talents | 240 | 120 | 80 | 30 | 470 | 3.13 | Agree |
| 5. | The girl-child will be well equipped to adapt to the knowledge-based economy of 21 st century if given free education. | 272 | 126 | 40 | 20 | 458 | 3.05 | Agree |
| 6. | Girls will be able to compete favourably with boys if given free education | 320 | 90 | 30 | 25 | 465 | 3.1 | Agree |

Result in Table 1 above shows that all the six items in the table are highly rated by the respondents. The six items have mean ratings above the cut-off point of 2.50. Therefore, the respondents agree that when free education is offered to the girl-child; the following will be obtained: more girls will enroll in secondary school, there will be more girls taking science subjects; the girls' self-concept will improve; the girls will have the opportunity to realize and develop their talents; girls will be better equipped to adapt to the knowledge-based economy of 21st century; and be able to compete favourably with their male counterparts.

Table 2: Mean rating on how entrepreneurship education will help to achieve gender equality

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | FX | \bar{X} | Decision |
|--|--|-----|-----|----|----|-----|-----------|----------|
| Entrepreneurship education for the girl-child will: | | | | | | | | |
| 7. | Equip the girl with saleable skills that can make her economically independent | 360 | 90 | 60 | 10 | 520 | 3.46 | Agree |
| 8. | Make her an employer of labour | 320 | 90 | 30 | 25 | 465 | 3.1 | Agree |
| 9. | Make her contribute to nation building | 240 | 120 | 60 | 30 | 450 | 3. | Agree |
| 10. | Help her be a better wife and mother | 80 | 60 | 84 | 68 | 292 | 1.94 | Disagree |
| 11. | Make her a role model for other girls | 272 | 126 | 40 | 20 | 458 | 3.05 | Agree |
| 12. | Develop in her the skill of creativity | 200 | 150 | 60 | 30 | 440 | 2.93 | Agree |
| 13. | Help to boost her self-esteem | 180 | 75 | 40 | 60 | 355 | 2.36 | Agree |

Results in Table 2 indicate that all the items have mean ratings above the cut-off point of 2.50, except item number 10 which has mean rating of 1.95. The respondents do not agree that entrepreneurship education for the girl-child will make her a better wife and mother. The respondents however agree that entrepreneurship education for the girl-child will: equip her with saleable skills, make her an employer of labour, make her contribute to nation building, make her a role model for other girls, develop in her the skill of creativity, and help to boost her self-esteem.

Discussion

An examination of the result in Table 1 showed that the respondents agreed that to achieve gender equality in secondary school education, free education should be given to the girl-child. This underlies the fact that poverty is one of the major reasons why many girls are denied secondary education. This finding agrees with Eze (2008) who noted that many factors, one of which is poverty are attributed to why girls between the ages of 10 and 16 years, who by the educational system in Nigeria should be in secondary schools are lagging behind. Poverty is pervasive on the African continent and preference for male child has caused many poor parents to spend their meager income on the education of their male children rather than their girl children.

Mamman (2003) noted that a lot of girls are dropping out of school or not being sent to school at all because the parents are poor, therefore, the little money parents have to scrounge for sending children to school is seen as too big an investment to risk on the girl-child. In order to achieve sustainable development in any country, girls' education must be a reality in policy and practice, not merely a rhetorical chimera. Shirley,

Randell, and Gergel (2010:39) stated that “closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education is the only viable path to educating nations and reaching the goals of capacity building that form the cornerstone of international development. They noted that providing financial incentives for girls’ education to help poorer families is one of the steps which have been identified by practitioners, policy makers and researchers as essential to closing gender gap in secondary education.

Result in Table 2 indicated that the respondents agreed that equipping girls in secondary school with entrepreneurship skills is one of the ways to close gender disparity. Many girls and women have been subordinated and subjugated due to poverty. Poverty has ravaged a lot of girls and women due to insufficient or total lack of education and skills. Hence equipping them with entrepreneurship skill is inevitable to closing gender disparity. This finding agrees with Ossai (2005) who stated that skill-based (entrepreneurship) education will empower women with knowledge and skills that will help them make meaningful existence especially with spiraling economic and social challenges in Nigeria. Generally, women in Nigeria have limited access to socio-economic rights and privileges, and have lower social status, and are limited by traditional practices (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1996). In a situation whereby women are denied access to land and credit facilities in financial institutions because of anti-women cultural practices and lack of collateral, equipping them with entrepreneurship skills will help to boost their economic power, thereby achieving gender equality.

Conclusion

Girls and women generally have been lagging behind educationally and economically consequent of poverty of parents and anti-female culture in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The low levels of education as well as low economic status amongst girls/women have created a wide gender disparity which needs to be closed. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established in 2000 at the United Nations Millennium summit outlined a list of eight overarching goals for developing countries to achieve by 2015. One of the goals (Goal 3a) is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and at all levels by 2015. Lack of government support for girls’ education seems to be the most pressing issue confronting the achievement of MDG 3a. Government need to make policies directly targeting gender disparity in secondary education. There is need for substantial financial support for the education of the girl-child since poverty has been a cog in the wheel of girl-child education. The girl-child’s education need to be enriched with entrepreneurial skills in order to improve her economic status.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide free and compulsory education for the girl-child.
2. Non-governmental organizations should partner with the government to offer financial assistance to girls in secondary schools.
3. Entrepreneurship education should be incorporated into girls’ education in secondary schools.

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