

# Girl Child Education and Its Importance to Her Economic Advancement

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## Abstract

This study examines the importance of girl child education to her economic advancement in Nigeria. The study highlighted the importance of education of women as well as girl child. It is on record that 'man in his position as father and husband is the direct oppressor and beneficiary, individually and directly, of the subordination of women'. This patriarchal position of the society subjected women to the position they found themselves today. The study adopted the Modernisation Theory because this theory blames internal cultural factors for women's subordination in the developing world. The central thrust of this theory is that males are accorded patriarchal control and dominance over a range of female activities and, consequently, women have little status in developing societies. There are various challenges faced by women to obtain equal education in all forms of formal education in Nigeria. I concluded that given women quality education will empower them more than any other empowerment programme. Education should be a right for all Nigerian children irrespective of gender, religion and disability. By way of recommendation, education therefore is the best empowerment programme we can give to our female children as well as male children to have a good future.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Education, Gender Inequality, Social Development, Marginalisation

## Introduction

Girl-child education is a worrying issue that has not been given the required attention that it deserved both in the rural and urban areas in the country. Whether a girl should be educated or not is an unresolved issue in the latex of most cultures in Nigeria with disparities between the education that boys and girls receive (Makama, 2014). According to Dr. Robert Limlim, UNICEF's Deputy Representative, educating girls is known to be the basis for sound economic and social development. Educating girls produces mothers who are educated and who will in turn educate their children, care for their families and provide their children with adequate nutrition.

The current female literacy rate (ages 15 and above) in the country is put at 59.4 percent a figure less than the male adult literacy rate of 74.4 percent. The girl's phenomenon is a less attentive issue especially their welfare and role in nation building. Some experts have identified socio-cultural patterns, religious misconceptions, poverty, teenage pregnancy and early marriage as factors militating against girl-child education. Girls in Nigeria are often seen moving around in towns and villages and hawking items of paltry value that hardly justifies the hours spent in the burning sun. Sometimes they become vulnerable to harassment from men. The parents of the girl child especially the mother consider their daughters as a tool for generating incomes to the family due to poverty and illiteracy instead of sending them to school at their tender age (Makama, 2014).

To educate means to train the mind, character and abilities of individual. Education is a fundamental human right that should be availed to all citizens irrespective of age, sex and nationality. The importance of education in the life of an individual can never be overemphasized. The greatest favour one can do to himself or herself is to get quality education. According to a Chinese proverb, education is the best legacy to give to a child because "giving your child a skill is better than giving him/her one thousand pieces of gold" (Lawal, 2016).

Girls' education is a human right. Educating girls contributes significantly to the development of a stable, prosperous and healthy nation state whose citizens are active, productive and empowered. Women in Nigeria have had various challenges to obtain equal education in all forms of formal education in Nigeria. Education is a basic human right and has been recognised as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. A woman's education is imperative to the advancement and development of her community and country. Improving women's education can bring tremendous development in a country's economy, and society (Zymaris, 2016).

Education has the real power of transforming your life and changing it for better. It is one of the most powerful tools available to be used for success and greatness. Education is an essential part of any community, because this process promotes getting knowledge and developing skills by people. Education also means getting a degree or some level of schooling by a person. Some people are after diploma or a degree. However, that is not a true purpose of education. It is meant not only to equip a person to be able to get a job and earn some money, but also to have a constructive mind. It installs innovative ideas and ideals, set new aspirations and uncovers new horizons. It has the power of transforming lives. Even today there is such a thing called "Girl effect". Providing good education to little girls brings transformation and empowers the entire community and country.

The best legacy to give to any female child is education. Any additional year spend in school empowers women greatly. Education is a veritable tool for the sustainable development of any economy. There have been

calls for women to be involved in ensuring sustainable development of their countries. However, for this to be achieved, women must contribute towards that through quality education (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). Little over 60 percent of Nigerians (the adults) can write and read. This data is true for 2014. Traditionally in this country more education is gotten by males (72 percent of them gain the above stated skills); only little more than half of the adult women can read and write, and over the years the number grows slowly.

Since the "UN Declaration of the Decade of Women" in 1975, attention and action on women's concerns have steadily increased and education, whether it be the form of consciousness-raising or skills acquisition, was one of the areas women's organisations, government agencies and international donor agencies focused on. Education and Empowerment therefore was convened amidst the discussion on the relevance of women's education in improving the situation of women, in the short term, and in emancipating women, in the long run. Furthermore, the Seminar took place during a crucial phase at the UNESCO Institute for Education, where women's non-formal education is going to be a key concern. In view of the "World Conference on Women" to be held in Beijing in 1995, the seminar meant to be one of many actions and activities relevant to women's issues which will be initiated, organized and/or supported by the Institute (Medel-Anonuevo, 1993).

The only way women can escape from the shackles and grip of poverty and be heard is through education. Quality education empowers women greatly. Nigerian females make up more than half of the nation's population, and in order for them to be involved in the development of their country, they need to be literate (UNESCO, 2002). Therefore, if half of the population of a country is illiterates, sustainable development will be hampered. Educating females of a country is one of the ways of empowering them and investing into the future of such country. This goes to prove right the saying that 'if you train a woman, you have trained the nation' (Okojie, 2011). Based on the traditional beliefs of Nigerians, before now females place is in the kitchen, thus discriminating them from participating in other spheres of the economy (Ponte, 2006).

### **Theoretical Framework of Gendered Development**

A theory as an abstraction, a mental product arising from an attempt to find a solution to a problem. Theory suggests alternative ways to solve a problem of interest to a researcher. It develops idea that allow a scientist to explain events which may be social, mechanical or even mathematical (Charles, 2005). This work adopted the modernisation theory to look at women equality and the importance of education to the woman folks. Modernisation theory is a theory used to explain the process of modernisation that a nation goes through as it transitions from a traditional society to a modern one. The theory has not been attributed to any one person; instead, its development has been linked to American social scientists in the 1950s.

Modernisation Theory blames internal cultural factors for women's subordination in the developing world. It is argued that some traditional cultures, and especially the religious ideas that underpin the values, norms, institutions and customs of the developing world, ascribe status based on gender. In practice, this means that males are accorded patriarchal control and dominance over a range of female activities and, consequently, women have little status in developing societies. Modernisation theorists note that gender is generally greater in more developed countries and believe that there is relationship between modernisation, economic growth and greater gender equality. The World Bank appears to be a strong proponent of this view today.

### **Education as Empowerment Tool for Nigerian Girl Child**

Education has significant role to play as far as empowering our girl child for economic development and nation building. If education is the key to success in life, it can also help to end discrimination, marginalization, subjugation, inequality and enslavement our women have suffered hitherto in the hands of men. Women in Nigeria have had various challenges to obtain equal education in all forms of formal education in the country. Education is a basic human right and has been recognised as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills. To ensure equal access to education, the National Policy on Education states that access to education is a right for all Nigerian children regardless of gender, religion and disability. In Empowerment Disparities still exist between men and women in education, employment and income opportunities, control over assets, personal security and participation in the development process.

The importance of education for the advancement of women was highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, which again identifies it as one of the 12 critical areas of concern and further affirmed it as central for gender equality and women empowerment. The Platform for Action also called for eliminating discrimination in education based on gender at all levels, eradicating illiteracy among women and improving access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education.

There are strong links between women's education and health; and according to EarthTrends, from 1975 to 1995, gains in women's education in 63 different countries contributed significantly to a reduction in malnutrition. Better education for women also has a direct and positive impact on HIV infection rates. The Education for All report 2011 outlines the impact of education on the health of women and children. Any

additional year a woman spend in school increases her survival rate and increases her economic empowerment. A 10% increase in girls' secondary school enrolment in low income countries will save approximately 350,000 children's lives and reduce maternal mortality by 15,000 deaths every year. Illiteracy among women increases child mortality in our communities.

"Education empowers women more effectively which would help to abolish gender inequality, develop their potentials, increase social and economic return, improve the quality of life, produce educated and healthy children and reduce fertility and mortality rates. Education is key to empowering women's participation in decision making in democracy, dynamic transformation of society and shaping the destiny of future generations." The welfare of the world cannot improve unless the condition of women is improved." It is education which can do so by empowering women.

Education aids women to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. "Education is the milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life" (UNIFEM). Education can empower women to develop and tap their potentials to the fullest, and they will be able to contribute better to societal development. Fadeiye and Olanegan (2001) posit that the interest of women, which is still being neglected, can only be served when they are educated. They will then be in a better position to contribute substantially to development in all its ramifications. So, we can't neglect the importance of education about women empowerment.

The recent political interest being shown by educated women in our country have also challenged the uneducated women in the society and the masses at large to understand that the place of women is no longer only in the kitchen. Makama (2014) posits that Nigeria is one of the countries listed amongst the developing nations; this is so because of her inability to harness her resources towards nation building in other sensitive areas that need special attention like the girl-child education. Girl-child education falls under goals two and three of the Millennium Development Goals enshrined under UN's resolution in 1996, and which Nigeria is a member nation. Unfortunately, it received worst treatment because of the lackadaisical/ nonchalant attitude of Nigerian leaders.

Girl-child education is the key to the empowerment of the female child, it allows them to claim their rights and prepare them for the future to assume responsibility as duty bearers for the next generation. In most societies, the female child is often discriminated upon, right from birth to adulthood due to some traditional and cultural practices. Education is the most important empowerment we can give to our female child.

Because of prevailing gender discrepancies, most girls are excluded from school and end up uneducated. It is sad to note that often, the exclusion of girls is because of ignorance on the part of some parents who see the education of the girl-child as a "waste of resources". They believe strongly that there is no point in educating a girl when sooner than later she would be married off.

Another major setback in the educational development of the girl child is poverty. The low economic status of the rural and urban poor has often resulted in many families withdrawing their female children from school to give room for their male counterparts. Most times, the female child is subjected to street hawking or other petty economic activities to raise money to educate her male siblings. Because of the vulnerability of the girl-child, she is often sexually harassed by teachers and older men who exploit on her naivety, thus resulting in unwanted pregnancies, abortion and its attendant consequences leading to the termination of her education pursuit.

## Conclusions

From all indications, it is obvious that women in Nigeria have not been treated equally with their men counterparts. Apart from that, women are still marginalized, cheated, oppressed and treated as second-class citizens by men. It is quite clear that the root cause of discrimination against women in Nigeria could be traced to the educational imbalance between men and women. With education, she would break the shell of ignorance and open that of self-discovery.

The benefit associated with girl child education remain vital in terms of her options and resources over her lifetime. According to UNICEF (2004), the benefits extend beyond the girl in affecting her family and society, the benefits to society include enhanced economic development, education for the next generation, healthier young girls and families and fewer maternal deaths. Girl child education remain a veritable tool in nation development thus development of any society would be grossly lopsided if the girl child is not given quality education. The paper concludes that the best empowerment you can give to women in this country is quality and affordable education and it is part of UN Human Rights. If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but when you educate a woman, you educate the entire nation.

Without good education, empowerment programmes and trainings cannot be absorbed by illiterate women in the rural areas. These women need a bit of education to understand what it is to make soap and other things. In the words of Levine et al (2008), providing one extra year of education to girls increases their wages by 10-20%. This increase is 5% more than the corresponding returns on providing a boy with an extra year of schooling.

In addition to total economic growth, women's education also increases the equitability of the distribution

of wealth in a society. Increased women's education is important for achieving this as it targets the impoverished women, a particularly disadvantaged group (Hanushek, 2008:23-40).

### Recommendations

There is urgent need to build more girls' schools in all States of the federation and either make it free or affordable for our rural and urban girls. It is important to also establish vocational school in all the states and make it compulsory for our females to attend. These schools when built should be equipped properly and qualified teachers recruited to pass on the necessary knowledge to these females. Scholarship should also be made available to the very bright ones amongst them.

A law should be promulgated against early and forced marriage. Every girl child must be made to attend school at least to senior secondary level. This will go a long way towards empowering women than any other programme. Women's education will surely increase the income of women and leads to growth in the country's economy.

Girls education is not just about getting girls enrolled in school, but also ensuring that they stay there and are safe. Also, government as well as NGOs should also do well to provide the books and uniforms needed for this to be possible. Our government can afford to give free education to these girls. This is because of the financial struggle most families in the rural areas are facing that it becomes very difficult paying school fees. The former First Lady of the United States of America, Michelle Obama in Madrid, Spain on June 30, 2016, when asked, "What does education mean to young women around the world? She answered thus; "I want every girl on the planet to have the same kind of opportunities that I have had, and that my daughters are having, to fulfill their potential and pursue their dreams."

The NGOs in the state have a lot to do to see that total education for girl child is achieved in state. Books, uniforms and other materials needed by these young girls should be provided to make it happen. These girl children should be made to understand the importance of education to them. When these women are empowered educationally they will in turn, support their families, communities and then the state as well as the country. Education therefore is the best empowerment we can give to our female children as well as male children to have a good future.

Finally, all children in the state should be made to be in school and any child be it male or female caught selling along the road or street should be arrested and his/her parents punished. Every child must embrace education irrespective of gender. Nigeria will develop better if most of us are educated, be it man or woman. With education, our business men and women will thrive better in their respective businesses. The child's Right Act should be strengthened and implemented in all states of the federation. This would go a long way in check mating indiscriminate girl child abuse.

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