
EMPLOYING CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper focused on employing child friendly school environment to transform girl-child education. The situation of girl-child education was examined. A child friendly school environment was seen as a place that is conducive for girl-child's growth, development, and learning. Challenges for achieving this effort were identified and certain factors for enhancing child friendly environment were enlisted. These solutions, when followed tenaciously by the government, school administrators, teachers, parents and students, would help transform the girl-child education both in Nigeria and the global society.

Keywords: Child Friendly School Environment, Transformation, Girl-Child, Education

Everyone needs a conducive environment for effective growth, development and performance. The environment could be physical social, psychological, or spiritual in nature; and these are often expressed in one's home, school, or both. Environment nurtures and trains. Someone, including children, could be positively or negatively influenced by his/her environment. Therefore, the importance of child friendly school environment to the transformation of children education, in general, and girl-child, in particular, cannot be overemphasized.

A child-friendly school is a place where the learning environment is conducive, the staff are friendly to children, and the health and safety needs of the children are adequately met,(UNESCO 2001). It is not just a child-welcoming school but also a child-seeking school. It works to attract and retain children from different backgrounds, respects diversity and ensures non-discrimination. Some innovations have helped make schools more inclusive(UNICEF, 2009).

That is why in developed countries children are in permanent or temporary buildings, in tents or under trees –sharing the experience of learning, developing their potential and enriching their lives (UNICEF, 2009). This is not so in some developing countries. In such places schooling is not always a positive experience for many children. It can mean shivering in cold, unheated buildings or sweating in hot, airless ones. It can mean being forced to stand in unfurnished classrooms, being hungry, thirsty or unwell, it can also mean being frightened by the threat of punishment, humiliation, bullying or even violence at the hands of teachers and fellow pupils. These conditions thwart learning and development. They are made worse when learners are without competent teachers to guide them, textbooks to learn from or exercise books to write in, or if they have textbooks of inferior quality that reinforce damaging stereotypes. Some schools have no toilets, running water or electricity, while some lack safe drinking water, lack sanitary excreta disposal facilities, soap and water, and inadequate and imbalanced diet (World Bank (2014). These conditions and more thwart learning for children especially girl-child who are very sensitive to environmental change.

Girl-Child Education

The development vision for gender equity is a world in which women and men, girls and boys enjoy economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights and are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, and their communities, are equally able to access quality education and healthcare, accumulate and control their own economic assets and resources, exercise their own voice, and live free from intimidation, harassment, discrimination, and violence (USAID, 2012). Besides, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) established universal access to primary education with special emphasis on girls, as a goal for children's development in the 1990s; World Summit for Children asserted that efforts for the enhancement of women's status and their role in development must begin with the girl-child; and the World Conference on Education for All emphasized that its most urgent priority is to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for girls (UNESCO, 1993).

Despite this effort, 53% of all out of school children are girls (United Nations International Children Education Fund [UNICEF] in Odeh, 2011). According to the UNICEF statements, poverty, exploitation and armed conflict magnify the risk women face even as they go to school, forcing many to study at home or drop out in fear of their safety. Girls' participation in education continues to trail that of boys; gender continues to play a major role in determining who goes to school. In general, the primary school enrolment ratio for girls in Africa is less than that of boys by at least 20 percentage points in about twenty-two countries, their dropout rate is also greater than that of boys, few girls complete the primary school cycle; the 'gender gap' in schooling, is manifested by disparity in boys' and girls' achievement (Clark, & Elaine, in Emah, Etudor-Eyo, & Udofia, (2014).

Nevertheless, UNICEF in Odeh, (2011) recounted that making women have access to quality education is key to sustainable economic development; and women with access to education not only vastly improve their own lives but also bring change to

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their families, economies, and societies, adding that providing women with quality education is a highly effective tool to address poverty and fight disease. Therefore, the need to transform education of the girl-child through child friendly school environment.

Child Friendly School Environment: A typical child friendly school environment is shown in Figure 1. Child friendly school has five key dimensions which include the following:-

- i) **Inclusiveness:** Proactively inclusive to children with different abilities in terms of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic aspects.
- ii) **Child centeredness:** Academically effective and relevant to children's needs for life and livelihood, knowledge and skills.
- iii) **Health and protection:** Healthy and safe for, and protective of children's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.
- iv) **Gender Responsiveness:** Gender-responsive in creating environments and capacities fostering equality.
- v) **Democratic participation:** Actively engaged with, and enabling of student, family, and community participation in all aspects of school policy, management and support to children. A school is considered child friendly if all of these elements are addressed.

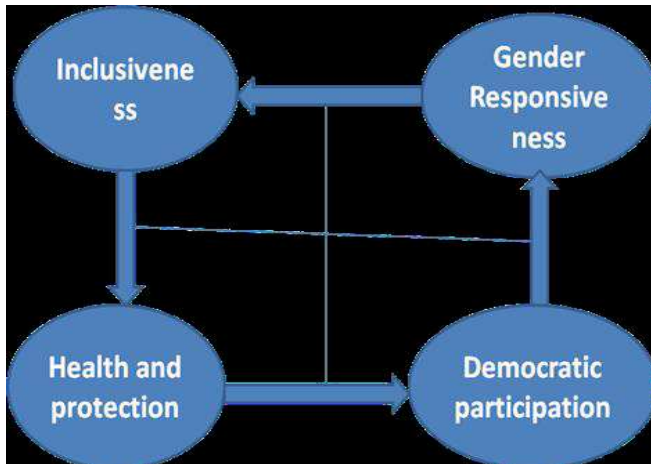


Figure 1: Child- Friendly School

Within the rights-based framework schools must have the following basic characteristics, firstly, they must be child-seeking schools. Schools must actively identify excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning. All children are to be treated as subjects with rights and the states as duty bearers with obligations to fulfil these rights. Secondly, the schools have to be child-centred schools

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that is acting in the best interest of the child leading to the realisation of the child's full potential. The model is simple and encourages the following:

- Schools that operate in the best interest of the child, respecting the child's unique background and circumstances
- Educational environments that are safe, healthy and protective, environments build upon the assets that children bring from homes and communities
- Schools that are endowed with trained teachers, adequate resources and appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning
- Schools that protect children's rights and make their voices heard
- Schools that promote inclusiveness, gender sensitivity, tolerance and personal empowerment.

Child- Friendly Schools Initiative In Nigeria

Child-friendly schools Initiative was introduced in Nigeria in year 2000. It is a right-based program focusing on safe, conducive and healthy environment, teachers and other stakeholders' involvement, greater enrolment and improved student performance amongst others. Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) has endorsed the importance of girl-child education in national development and advertises educational equality and bears part of the cost in the training of Nigerian graduates.

Transforming Girl-Child Education through Child Friendly School Environment (CFSE)

Many studies have been conducted to show how important child- friendly schools are to the growth and development of children. Such studies include that of Helpdesk (2010), which showed that in child friendly schools, classrooms and teaching methodologies lead to improved learning outcomes, not only test scores but wider competencies and skills.

From UNICEF Child Friendly Schools Programming Global Evaluation report(2009), it was found that there are several CFS, models, all successfully applying the key principles of inclusiveness, child-centeredness, and democratic participation in varying contexts and with varying emphasis. Learners in child-friendly schools felt safe, supported, and engaged, and believed that the adults in the school support the inclusion and success of all students in schools that had high levels of family and community participation and were implementing child-centred pedagogical approaches. More importantly, child-friendly schools were found to be successful in creating environments where female students experienced a positive school climate. Mandiudza,(2013) from her study found out that the absence of teaching and learning resources and ignorance of the convention on the rights of children contributed to the poor conditions in schools, conditions that thwart learning, not only at school but even at home, in the community and society at large.

Young, (2002) posits that "Child friendly environment aims to develop a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. Staff members are friendly and welcoming to children and attend to all their health and safety needs" .

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Proving the importance of a child friendly environment to acquisition of ideas, knowledge and skills Yunus, (2003) maintains, "Given the right opportunities and the right learning environment, children will develop in similar ways whatever their background is.

Psychologists in the US found that across a range of abilities, children at Montessori schools which are child-friendly schools out-performed those given a traditional education. A controversial schooling method that focuses on personal development rather than exams produces more mature, creative and socially adept children, scientists have revealed. Result showed that CFS were better than the non FS in school facilities, head teacher/ teachers' qualification and performance; family/ community involvement, curricular/ curricular delivery, pupils enrolment.

According to Mandiudza,(2012), the attainment of quality education has, however, become elusive for most schools especially in rural areas. These schools are characterised by very little development values, high failure rates, absenteeism and discipline problems among both teachers and pupils (Scott 1999). There is therefore, need for a paradigm shift where schools focus on helping pupils to learn so that they acquire effective life skills to help them think creatively, make choices and solve problems if they are to develop into mature, responsible and successful individuals. If this is not done, bad schools result where children suffer from laziness and indifference, gross incompetence or unkindness on the part of the staff (Silver 1994). This is also supported by Duke (1999) who asserts that learning should be understood to encompass the application of knowledge more than just its acquisition. There is, therefore, need to make schooling experiences develop the children's potential to the fullest extent possible. This need gave birth to the Child-Friendly Schools model, an approach which enhances the delivery of quality education, it emanated from the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the children which came into force on 2 September 1990 to which Nigeria is a signatory.

Ivowi (2009) maintains that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values by individuals to solve societal problems is what leads to growth and development of the society. An individual who has acquired daily living skills is useful in changing the environment around for the benefit of the society. Such child can easily create wealth as he or she manipulates goods and services to create wealth for himself/herself and the nation. Such children will use their acquired skills to cause peace and tranquility; and to evolve growth and development of the economy such that can equally impact positively on average citizens.

The acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities of an individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society depends greatly on the skills to be acquired. Adeyemo (2009) views skill as the basic ability through which a man adjusts to life. The acquisition of these skills by a child before leaving school can make him or her to be self-sustaining and thus diffuse his/her energies from dubious endeavour to profitable ones. This is where a child friendly school stands taller than others.

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Within the education system, it can safely be concluded that Child Friendly School model is a means for supporting a dynamic, constantly evolving improvement in the overall education quality (Fushim 2010). The term may be new but many of its aspects are already familiar. It is UNICEF's signature means to advocate for and promote quality education for our children. Characteristics of schools are important determinants of quality education and academic achievements. There is also a growing agreement among educationists that all people can learn under the right conditions. It is therefore, imperative that all schools should try to develop environments conducive to learning for the girl-child. As such the following should be considered for the transformation of girl-child education:

1. Stopping discrimination against the girl-child by all school members.
2. Parents to provide a supportive learning environment for their children at home.
3. A clean environment at school
4. Students should have discipline, be punctual and take responsibility for themselves.
5. Teachers to provide diversity in their teaching methods by using different material.
6. Student must have the opportunity to learn from working groups and to get hands on experience.
7. School to conduct learning and classroom activities in accordance with to CRC principles.
8. Students' behavior should be respectful and polite.
9. Parents should promote and support self-confidence in their children.
10. School playground and rest areas should be there.
11. School to have a concrete road and fence.
12. School to have clean sanitation and toilets for students.
13. School is able to provide lunch and milk for students.
14. School to have classrooms and activities room equipped with updated equipment.
15. School to have clean drinking water.
16. Students to have an interest and confidence to express themselves.
17. School to have a field to conduct sporting activities for students.
18. Teachers to have good knowledge base and preparation plus modern equipment to teach students.
19. School to conduct outside the classroom learning activities for students.
20. Promote love and understanding and to help each other.
21. School to provide a boarding house for students who have to travel long distances.
22. School to closely work with development centres for small children.
23. School to have a good canteen.
24. School to have a sporting field and modern equipment.
25. School to have the method and capacity to help and protect at risk children.

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26. School to have an activities room and to provide learning activities inside and outside the classroom.
27. School to have clean sanitation and toilets.
28. School to have sufficient buildings for the number of students.
29. Teachers to provide assistance for children who are experiencing problems with their schoolwork.
30. Students to respect other people and be confident to communicate and participate in activities.
31. Updated learning materials such as computers and musical instruments should be provided.

However, some school environment are faced with certain challenges. Such are evidenced in the study by Okon (2015) where the following challenges on child school environment were identified: obsolete facilities, high cost of maintenance, poorly motivated staff, unequal treatment of staff and pupils, inadequate transport services, poor relationship between staff and management, poor welfare packages to staff, non-repair and replacement of spoilt equipment, poor or lack of reward system for staff, lack or no encouragement by head teacher for staff development, hasty decision making by head teacher when staff defaults, and poor staff remuneration in comparison with tasks assigned them by school. These conditions could thwart learning for children especially girl-child who are very sensitive to climate change.

Conclusion

In view of the fact that school environment is significantly related to children's learning, everything possible must be done to make the schools girl-child friendly. This therefore calls for a collaborative effort of all education stakeholders to provide necessary infrastructure and personnel that will address the challenges of school environments thereby making it learner friendly towards the transformation of girl-child education.

Overcoming the Challenges

1. School administrators should sustain schools so as to enhance better teaching and learning activities.
2. School proprietors and Head Teachers should establish a cordial relationship with the staff as this will give them a sense of belonging and help them discharge their duties effectively, thereby creating a child- friendly atmosphere.
3. Teachers in schools should be highly motivated with incentives, rewards, higher remuneration, and welfare packages by the government. These will make them happier and more committed to their duties. When they are happy, they will create a friendly atmosphere for the children in learning and teaching.
4. Head Teachers of schools should treat every child fairly, no matter the socio-economic background of the child, to avoid bitterness and envy among staff and pupils.
5. Teachers should be encouraged by the school management to develop themselves and not retained in schools for fear of losing staff.

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6. To ascertain the quality and child-friendliness of the schools, government through the Ministry of Education should supervise the activities of these schools.
7. Due to the high cost of maintaining child-friendly schools, government, individuals, and NGOs should support the running of these schools to help maintain the child-friendly environment for impactful learning on the girl-child.
8. Awareness in school against girl-child discrimination should be created by the government.

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