

GIRL CHILD EDUCATION: THE IMPLICATION OF RESEARCH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Girls' education brings a wide range of benefits not only for the girls themselves but also for their children and their communities, as well as society at large in terms of economic growth. Still, major gaps remain between boys and girls education as a result of obstacles that keep girls out of education. This study focuses on Girl Child Education: the Implication of Research in Nigeria. It also aims at finding who the girl child is and the importance of educating her in the society, the importance of research and dissemination of research findings on girl child education, the areas that are most researched or under-researched, the implication of under researched areas on girl child education and the way forward. The study finds out that most research on girl child focuses on the barriers of girl child education while other areas that could help to avert most of the barriers are kept untouched. Again that proper dissemination of research findings will go a long way in alleviating the problems of girl child education. The research uses secondary sources of data for its data collection.

Girls in Nigeria have had various challenges in order to obtain equal education. Education is a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. A positive correlation exists between the enrolment of girls in primary school and the gross national product and increase of life expectancy. Because of this correlation, according to Schultz (2002) enrolment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in any society. In the same stratum, Nussbaum, (2003) has it that "Rapid socio-

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economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the calibre of women and their education in that country. Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills.

In the 1960s, when most African states began to gain their political independence, there was considerable gender disparity in education. Girls' enrolment 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.

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 Kitetu, (2001) 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. 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 (Kitetu, 2001). 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 (UNESCO,1991). 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 (Obasi, 1997).

Historically, girls' education/gender disparity in education has not been a very popular topic among policy-makers and researchers. In recent years, however, it is increasingly being recognized that the existing knowledge related to girls' education and/or gender disparity is limited; hence more studies are needed on gender and education. Most of the research studies on girls' education and/or gender disparity in education centre on issues of barriers to schooling. Other areas that could help to achieve girl child education are under-researched. The big question remains: which areas

of girl child education are under researched? Of what importance is research on all aspect of girl child education?

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to find out:

- Who the girl child is and the importance of educating her in the society.
- The areas of girl child education that is most researched or under-researched in Nigeria.
- The implication of these neglected areas to girl child education.
- The importance of research and the dissemination of research findings.
- If there is any recommendation to help avert the implications on the girl child education.

Research Question

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- Who is the girl child and what is the benefit of educating her in the society?
- What areas of girl child education are most researched or under-researched in Nigeria?
- What is the implication of these neglected areas to girl child education?
- Of what importance is the research and the dissemination of research findings?
- Is there any remedy to these implications?

Problem of the Study

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) states that education is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. According to (NUT, 2004), "Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends. Every one-percentile growth in female secondary schooling results in a 0.3 percent growth in the economy." Yet girls are often not educated in the developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. The problem here is what has kept and blindfolded these countries and Nigeria in particular from recognizing this fact to boost her economy? As such the aim of this study is to expose other areas of girl child education that have been neglected which are also contributing to girls drop out of school in Nigeria.

Definition of the Girl Child and the Benefit of Educating her in Nigeria

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to 18 years of age. During this period, the young girl is totally under the care of the adult who may be parents, guardians or elder siblings. It is also a period when the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on others on who she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Sutherland, 2001).

Value of Educating Girls

It is estimated that the economic cost to 65 low and middle income countries of failing to educate girls to the same standard as boys is US \$92 billion per year. Their investment in girl's education delivers real returns – not just for individuals but for the whole society (Pritamkabe, 2011).

Economic and Social Impact

Failure to educate girls has a direct impact both on their families and on wider society. A number of studies have shown that increasing the number of girls benefiting from education has a positive effect on a country's per capita economic growth. This is true for both primary and secondary education. A World Bank study examined the effect of girls' education in 100 countries. It found: "An exogenous increase in girls' access to education creates a better environment for economic growth...the result is particularly strong for middle income countries. Thus, societies that prefer not to invest in girls pay a high price for it in terms of slower growth and reduced income".

Cross-country studies examining the impact of female education on GDP consistently demonstrate positive effects. Considering factors such as the lower fertility rates of educated women, increasing the share of women with secondary education by one percentage point increases a country's annual per capita income growth by an average of 0.3 percentage points. Educated women are more likely to enter the formal labour market, where earnings are higher than those of informal or home-based work. Women with secondary schooling see significant results. In countries with a tradition of dowries or bride prices the perceived value of a potential bride grows with education. Educated female farmers raise productivity and their returns can exceed those of men. Hence increasing female secondary education and reducing gender disparities lead to economic growth.

The social impact of female education is profound. Most prominent is the role of mothers' education in reducing infant and child mortality, lowering fertility, and promoting children's education. On average, infant mortality declines 5-10% for each year of girls' education. Results in Africa indicate a 40% in child survival for mothers with 5 years of primary education. Women with secondary education reduce their fertility by 2 or more children compared with uneducated mothers. A study of 14 countries suggests that an additional year of mothers' education raises the likelihood of children's enrolment by 1-6 percentage points. Greater control over family finances directly affects children, as women are more likely to spend discretionary resources on investments in human capital-health, education and food. HIV/AIDS disproportionately affects females, particularly teenage girls. Educated women are better able to reduce risky behaviour by negotiating safe sex with partners. Education also empowers women to fend off domestic violence. Evidence from Bangladesh and India reveals fewer beatings among women with some education. Education leads to higher social standing, more independence, and greater autonomy in women's lives and in the household. With all these positive impacts on economic and social development, countries cannot afford to neglect girls' education (Pritamkabe, 2011).

Areas Most Researched or Under-Researched

Historically, girls' education has not been a very popular topic among policy-makers and researchers. In recent years, however, it is increasingly being recognized that the existing knowledge related to girls' education and is limited; hence more studies are needed on gender and education.

Most of the research studies on girls' education or gender disparity in education centre on issues of barriers to schooling. Future researchers should look into the following areas, which are under-researched:

- ❖ **Girls' Security in the School Environment:** Often there are unreliable reports in the media dealing with sexual and other kinds of harassment of female students by male students and male teachers, and the subsequent anxiety and fear amongst girls and parents. As a result, parents are afraid of sending their daughters to school after they reach a certain age (e.g., puberty). What is the nature and magnitude of sexual abuse and violence? What are the various forms of abuse and harassment? Although there is a national drive to bring more girls into schools, nobody knows whether these schools are safe for girls.

- ❖ **Systemic Barriers:** While a substantial amount of research has examined barriers to schooling existing at the family and community levels, barriers imposed

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by the system have received less attention. It is always the society, culture and poverty that is blamed for gender disparity and the low participation of girls in education, while the institutional setup and policies engendering the disparity are least blamed. There exists little or no information on how the system itself creates barriers and promotes disparity.

- ❖ **The Classroom Experience of Girls:** Much research in Nigeria has focused on why girls do not enrol and why they leave school without completing the full course of study. Many pertinent issues remain unresolved. What are the classroom experiences of girls who stay? How do they view their experience in school and in classrooms? Are there equal learning opportunities for both boys and girls? Classroom studies examining teaching and learning practices, student engagement, teacher interaction, and reinforcement are largely lacking. Classroom-based research can provide rich information on the actual learning atmosphere and the opportunities provided to learn.
- ❖ **Lives of Women Teachers.** Most studies have concentrated on the supply of women teachers. Their actual experiences have been very much neglected and under-represented in research documents. There has been no attempt to understand the concerns, anxieties, hopes and aspirations of women teachers as distinct human identities.
- ❖ **Women Teachers and the Learning Achievement of Girls:** The studies have confirmed that the mere presence of women teachers increases girls' enrolment and decreases the incidence of girls leaving school; however, no studies have been conducted to determine whether the presence of women teachers improves learning achievement as well. The link between women teachers in the classroom and the academic performance of girls has not been investigated.
- ❖ **The Impact of the Ongoing Boko Haram Insurgency:** The current Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is reportedly hindering the enrolment of children, especially of girls and disadvantaged children. According to Ugwumba and Odom (2014) Hundreds of thousands of children have been displaced, girls kidnapped and schools closed down. Teachers are extorted, killed and humiliated. It is highly unlikely that Nigeria will attain the EFA goals under the current security challenge. No research has been conducted so far to assess the impact of insurgency on girls' education in Nigeria.

- ❖ **The Impact of Poverty on Girls Education:** Poverty has been reported as one of the barriers discouraging families from sending their children to school. Schooling requires a substantial commitment of time and resources, as well as sacrifices related to household production. Child labour is important for the economic survival of families. Girls contribute at least 50 per cent more labour than boys, and this contribution increases with age. Although primary education is officially free of charge, in essence it is not free because schools charge different kinds of informal fees (e.g., exam fees, admission fees, readmission fees, handiwork fees etc). The direct costs of schooling such as school uniforms and supplies can be beyond the means of the poor. The opportunity costs of schooling can be even higher because poor families are not able to sustain themselves without the involvement of children in agricultural production and household activities. Daughters are traditionally expected to do more chores at home than sons. As they are expected to do more, the opportunity costs of educating a girl can be higher, and so they are kept at home. The high opportunity costs combined with informal fees make schooling too expensive, which undermines the demand for girls' education. No research on impact of scholarship on girls' education has been conducted in Nigeria.

The Implication of the Under-researched Areas of Girl Child Education

While most of the Millennium Development Goals face a deadline of 2015, the gender parity target was set to be achieved a full ten years earlier - an acknowledgement that equal access to education is the foundation for all other development goals but because most of the important areas of girl child education were neglected, achievement of gender parity in education has not been possible. In countries where resources and school facilities are lacking, and total enrolments of girls are low, like in Nigeria, a choice must often be made in families between sending a girl or a boy to school. Until equal numbers of girls and boys are in school, it will be impossible to build the knowledge necessary to eradicate poverty and hunger, combat disease and ensure environmental sustainability. Millions of children and women will continue to die unnecessarily, placing the rest of the development agenda at risk. It is extremely important that girls have access to an education. According to (UNESCO, 2008) "for every additional year girls go to school, they receive 20 percent higher wages and suffer 10 percent fewer child deaths." 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. According to Saranga and Kurz (2006) "the education that a girl receives is the strongest predictor of the age she will marry and is a critical factor in reducing the

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prevalence of child marriage.” The World Bank estimates that an additional year of schooling for 1,000 women helps prevent two maternal deaths. Also, each additional year of formal education that a mother completes translates to her children staying in school an additional one-third to one-half of a year (UNICEF, 2004).

Lack of knowledge of importance of girl’s education caused by under researched work on every areas of girl’s education resulted to majority of girls not being educated since she is considered a strain on the family's resources. Without an education, she cannot even voice her opinion, stand up for herself monetarily as well as emotionally, or battle the discrimination from a social pulpit. Additionally, girls are less likely to have access to education. UNESCO noted that this is due to sexual violence, insecure school environments and inadequate sanitation that adversely affect girls’ self-esteem, participation and retention. According to Ugwulebo, (2011) “Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes have sometimes enforced negative stereotypes and have kept girls from receiving the education they need and deserve.” This is to say that if research is conducted in this area and the result disseminated to everyone, it is likely that the issue of depressing stereotypes that kept girls away from school will be averted.

Importance of Research and the Dissemination of Study Findings on Girls’ Education

The ultimate aim of all research is to produce knowledge that is practically relevant to the world of policy-making and practice. Studies are undertaken in direct response to the identification of a problem. The results are then expected to feed back directly into decision-making. As such research study and findings in the areas of girls’ education will be of great importance in the following areas:

- It is grounded on the assumption that the availability of research evidence would lead to better educational policies and decisions makings on girls’ education.
- It will provide Policy-makers and practitioners with all the knowledge to solve the practical problems of girls.
- It will also showcase many researchers and evaluators when their works have a direct and specific impact on policy-making or practice.
- The education acts, regulations, circulars and major decisions of the government were reviewed when the impact of educational research and findings were being assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

For any research, the challenge is how best to make the results widely available. If research findings are to be considered for possible utilization, appropriate dissemination strategies must be worked out right from the very beginning. Proper dissemination increases the usability of research findings. Each research work has an audience, primary and secondary. The first category of audience consists of the people who identify the need for undertaking the study and who commission the research. The second category of audience comprises those who use the new knowledge for their academic or personal advancement. The dissemination strategy should identify the audience first. The aim should be to reach as wide an audience as possible.

The extent to which research findings are disseminated can be established in a number of ways: (a) the availability of research reports to policy-makers and administrators (or the primary audience for research); (b) the understanding of key research findings, conclusions and recommendations by policy-makers and administrators; (c) the involvement of policy-makers and administrators at critical stages of research; (d) the preparation of a written executive summary that directly targets the primary audience; (e) conducting dissemination workshops; (f) the preparation and distribution of research reviews; and (g) the language of the report.

Availability of Research Reports: The heads of departments or sections of central departments of the Ministry of Education should have copies of the studies under review. It is often difficult to locate completed research works due to the lack of public library and documentation services.

Understanding of Research Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations: Most times, policy-makers and administrators in the Ministry have little knowledge of educational research or evaluation related to girls' education. They could be knowledgeable about one or two most recently conducted studies but did not have a clue about the findings and conclusions of many of the other studies under review which constitutes a problem to most of the challenges facing girls' education in Nigeria today.

Involvement of Policy-makers and Administrators at Critical Stages of Research: Policy-makers' and administrators' involvement in research design and execution can be useful in many ways. This is to say that collaboration of the right personnel in designing and executing the studies will help to circulate the findings of the study to a wider audience.

Preparation of an Executive Summary: Among many other things, executive summaries written in simple language can help to make policy-makers more likely to

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translate research findings into policy. Most of the literatures reviewed in the course of this study had no executive summaries as such contributes to most of the challenges of girls' education in Nigeria.

Conducting Dissemination Workshops: The effective way of reaching the audience is by conducting dissemination workshops, where research findings and conclusions can be shared with the relevant practitioners.

Preparation of Research Reviews: The main channel of communication between researchers and the larger audience occurs by means of reviews of entire fields of research, rather than the reports of single studies. The publication of research reviews can be a good step toward informing both practitioners and academics about the findings of studies and evaluations. This activity can improve communication between the producers and consumers of information and knowledge.

The Language of the Report: The extent to which educational research will have an impact on policy-making and practice can depend on the language used in the report. . Almost every report reviewed was prepared in English.

On the whole, it is clear that the investigation and dissemination of research findings on girls' education have been given little emphasis in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognise the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries and Nigeria in particular. This is as a result of neglected but important areas of girl child education. These important areas which ought to be investigated and properly disseminated the result findings to enable policy makers make policy that will favour girl child to enrol, retain or complete and achieve knowledge in school were deficient. This deficiency has adversely affected the girl child and the nation at large as she could not achieve economic growth and social development objectives.

Recommendations

In order to create a culture of research, spreading of research findings, policy-making and implementation of research findings in the areas of girl child education the following suggestions are made:

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- Researchers and practitioners must sit together to identify problems. Researchers must comprehend the key issues and questions to be examined so that they know where the focus and emphasis of the research should lie.
- Ministry of Education should organize training courses in educational research and evaluation for Policy-makers and administrators. This will help them to be more receptive to research findings.
- Ministry of Education should organise training courses to improve educational researchers/evaluators' understanding of the policy-making process and educational practice. Often researchers/evaluators have little knowledge of the educational policy-making process and educational practice. Courses could be designed to help them learn more about the making of policy and how it should be put into practice.
- Research firms or research and development sections of the Ministry of Education should be ready to prepare annual and bi-annual summary reports by reviewing educational research completed in different fields of education.
- The lack of systematic storage and documentation makes research information inaccessible and eventually contributes to research findings being unused. One major step toward the use of research findings is to establish a mechanism for the storage and documentation of research reports.
- Researchers and evaluators must prepare their reports in ways that will appeal to specific audiences. Bulky reports often scare people and are never opened. It is not necessary to include all the details in the report. Research findings presented in economical ways can find readers.
- The production of the research findings should be timely so that new information is readily available to policy-makers and planners.
- The mass media can be an extremely powerful and effective method for communicating research findings to a very large audience.
- Policy forums should be planned and organized where both policy-makers and researchers can meet to discuss key policy issues and how research can help resolve them.

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- The Ministry of Education should encourage university students and professors to undertake research in areas where research is required especially in the areas of girl child education. They should prepare a list of issues and questions that require systematic investigation, and ask university professors and graduate students to select from this list topics for theses/dissertations. Academics will have an opportunity to contribute to the practice of education, while policy-makers will have access to research-based information with little or no cost. Where resources permit, small research grants can be awarded to encourage young researchers to undertake studies in areas specified by practitioners.

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