

GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ZONE C SENATORIAL DISTRICT OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The issue of girl-child education is today a worldwide concern to all stakeholders in the education sector and the society as a whole because of the important role played by the females in the development process of the nation. This is not unlike in the past, where the education of a female child was not a priority of parents because of poverty and their cultural belief that the female education starts and ends in the kitchen and that women were mainly to make babies for men. The main thrust of this study is to investigate the influence of girl-child education on the development of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of this study comprised 44, 950 girls from secondary schools in Zone C. A sample of 450 girls was used for the study. A questionnaire titled “Girl-child Education and Development Questionnaire (GCEDQ)” was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviations were used to answer research questions while Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicate that, girl-child education has significant influence on political emancipation, economic empowerment and improvement in the health Condition of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria. It was recommended among others that parents and guidance should be oriented towards giving their female children education and stop giving them out for marriage at early stage.

Keywords: Girl-child Education, Development, Political Emancipation, Economic Empowerment

Dr. R. C. Odeh and Ezekiel Dondo Ivagher

Education is one of the fundamental aspects of human rights that should be given to all human beings irrespective of sex. This implies that whether one is a girl or boy, the opportunity of going to school to acquire knowledge should be given to all. The society today is unlike in the past when it was believed that the place of the girl-child is in her husband's house. The boy child was considered superior to the girl child in many aspects especially as regards education. It was only the male child that was given opportunity to be educated. Unfortunately, even in the modern days, many parents still hold unto this disparity between the female and male education. They prefer sending their male children to school especially when the family's status is low.

A girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development (Offorma, 2009). According to Sutherland (2001) this is a period when the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. The girl-child is seen as a young female who would eventually one day grow into a woman and marry. The girl-child is conditioned to only look after the younger ones, the home and the kitchen and that their education starts and ends in the kitchen.

In recent times, conferences, workshops, seminars, and symposiums educational matters has been organized to discuss about the need for girl- child education in the development of the nation. Education is the process whereby, they foster in the individuals desirable and relevant changes in behaviour and attitude thereby making them useful and functional in the society (Akpakwu, 2012).

According to Offorma (2009), it is the process through which the young ones acquire knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization. Education is described today as the most important aspect of human and a nation's development. It is seen as a key to successful living especially girl-child education. (Michael, 2011). This implies that denying the girl-child access to education will rather make her a dysfunctional member of the society.

Ocho (2005) asserts that the girl-child also needs to be educated to acquire knowledge and skills needed to advance her status and knowledge for social interaction, self-improvement and status advancement Ottaway (2000) identified areas that girl-child education can contribute to national development to include; political emancipation, economic empowerment, improvement in health, reduction in economic burden of the family and society and help in boosting the security of the nation.

All over the world today, women have also been identified as one of the major elements in the process of development. This is because of the significant role they play in the society (Nwaji, 2011). Women who are educated today take paid jobs and as such contribute in producing goods and rendering services to the people. It influences

Girl-Child Education And The Development Of Zone C Senatorial District Of Benue State, Nigeria

decisively her overall health. They strive to nurture and bring up their children in a healthier way that they can also grow and contribute to the nation's development. Also women who have access to education participate in politics by contributing in the decision-making process of her country. This implies that giving the girl-child access to education will go a long way in helping to achieve sustainable development of the Zone C Sensational District of Benue State in particular and Nigeria as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

Girl-child education has in recent times become a matter of concern to stakeholders in Nigeria and Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State in particular. This is because of the extent at which women education has been neglected by most parents from different ethnics' background and tribes. Stakeholders are complaining while the boy child is given more education attention than the girls.

Over the years, the role of the girl-child in Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State has been erroneously conceptualized to household keeping and child bearing. This is why the boys are groomed for careers in technical and scientific fields while the females are guided to concentrate on home economies by forgetting the fact that all individuals irrespective of sex need to be liberated so as to enhance their contribution to the development of the society.

It is important that the girl-child be educated so as to also contribute positively to the growth and development of the society. The women play very important roles of performing economic function of helping to produce goods and services. They also help to improve the health of the individuals by becoming nurses as well as engage in active politics in which they also contribute in making positive decisions which bring about growth and development of their society. They also help in the protection of environment with knowledge and skills acquire through education. This implies that, for Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State to develop, the girl-child must be given and allowed access to quality education.

From observation by the researcher it means that parents, teachers and the school appears not to have earned out enough investigations on the influence of girl-child education on development in the area of study. There is therefore a felt need by the researcher to investigate further into the possible influence of girl-child education on development in the study area. The problem of this study stated in a question form therefore is: What is the influence of girl-child education on the development of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of girl-child education on the development of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. Specially, the study intends to:

1. find out the influence of girl-child education on political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.
2. ascertain the influence of girl-child education on economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of girl-child education on the political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State?
2. How does girl-child education influence the economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

H₀₁ Girl-child education has no significant influence on political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

H₀₁ Girl-child education has no significant influence on the economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study would serve as a source of enlightenment to parents and guardians on the values of educating the girl-child thereby erasing all the cultural earlier beliefs about the girl-child education. This will help to facilitate political emancipation of the people of Zone C and the entire nation. The findings of this study would also serve as an eye opener to government on the need to encourage girl-child education through her policy and also give scholarship to girls especially from the less privileged parents so that they would have to be educated. This would help to improve on the economic empowerment of the area and the nation at large.

The result of this study would also create awareness in the minds of the girl-child who have been engaged in petty trading business, subsistence farming or waiting to be giving out for marriage to rather prepare and be ready to go to school so that they could help in improving the health condition of themselves and their people. Lastly, the result of the study would be relevant to teachers, students, school authorities, government and educational planners as well as those who may wish to carry out a study on a related topic and make recommendations for policy makers.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature is carried out under the following sub-headings.

Concept of Girl-Child Education

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 (Sutherland in Kobani, 2014). According to Gomwalk (1996), girl-child education is the knowledge and skills given to the girl-child in the formal school settings to enable her to advance her status- knowledge for interaction, self-improvement and status advancement. Maisamani (2006) defines girl-child education as the process of eliminating gender discrimination in education, creating more opportunities and equal access to education for both boys and girls. It is thus, a programme towards the enhancement of gender equality through education.

Education is the acquisition of knowledge that tends to train and develop the individual. It embraces not only the school experiences but also indirect or incidental influences which help us to learn. Such influences and activities affect our character, behaviours and perceptions (Emenike, 2004). It is a vital tool for empowerment that allows meaningful contributions to the society.

Concept of Development

Development is a concept first associated with humanity and creative energies. It is an improvement in the capacity of the individual and society to control the forces of nature as well as themselves and other individuals and societies for their own benefit and that of humanity at large. It is a process of actualizing people's inherent capacity, greater freedom, self-confidence, creativity, self-discipline and responsibility (Olokoba, Abdullahi, Tijani, Balogun and Hajia, 2013).

Kwumelu in Shamija and Garba (2008:17) defines development as involving the "transformation of society through its institutions, organizations, social rules customary usages and attitudes to an extent that makes the society more and more positive and responsive to desired modern changes".

Influence of Girl-Child Education on Political Emancipation

Educating the girl-child today is the greatest investment any nation can provide to ensure development considering the diverse roles women play in the society today especially by actively participating in politics. Stronquist (2000) states that politically, the girl-child is relegated to the background in the society. They are in most cases under-represented in the decision-making process because of the notion that, a woman's place is in the kitchen. The problem is also compounded by the girl-child's deficiency in educational qualification. Therefore, should girls be educated, they would be empowered in adulthood to participate in politics not only as contestants which

Dr. R. C. Odeh and Ezekiel Dondo Ivagher

would give them the opportunity to partake in vital decisions that affect their lives and that of their entire society.

Ballara (2000) when he observed the importance of the girl-child education in social development, as the education of the girl child has bearing on the economic well-being of a community, and when the girl child is academically qualified and grows into a woman, she will contribute to the political development of her nation. He further states that when the girl-child is academically qualified and grows into a woman, she will contribute to the political development of his society by and large.

Influence of Girl-Child Education on Economic Empowerment

The relationship between education and development is established very well in such that education is a lay index of development. Several researches have shown that education improves productivity and reduces negative features of life such as child trafficking, child labour. World Bank (2002) in support of this states that girl-child education raises the economic productivity of a nation

According to Marshal (2003) women make up more than half of the population of Nigeria and they have been known to have contributed in many ways to the development of the society. For the girl-child to face the challenges of time therefore requires they have access to the benefits of formal and informal education to the same levels and of the same quality as that given to the boys. He further stressed that it is the only way the girl-child can contribute maximally to the economic development of their communities and Nigeria at large.

Nwaji (2011) notes that many years ago, almost all women were full time house wives except those that were involved in farming activities. In recent times however, educated women are competing with their male counterparts in labour market and are contributing immensely to the economic achievement of their families and the nation. The United Nation platform in Nwaji notes that “literacy of women is an important key: investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women have proved to be best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth of a nation.

Kobani (2014) states that, a woman’s literacy increases productivity and self-employment in the informal sector. For example, the girl-child may become active participants in all stages of the productive chain, i.e. hoeing, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and threshing of grains, storage and distribution of goods need to be educated to increase productivity and their incomes. Ottaway (2000) posits that the girl-child education has bearing on the economic wellbeing of a country, with education, in adulthood, the girl-child could easily gain employment in the formal labourforce and therefore contribute not only to her family but the national GNP.

Girl-Child Education And The Development Of Zone C Senatorial District Of Benue State, Nigeria

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 44, 950 girls from secondary schools in Zone C. A sample of 450 girls was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample size because the population was homogeneous. A 15-item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers titled “Girl-child Education and Development Questionnaire (GCEDQ)” was used for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by experts in Educational Management and Tests and Measurement from the Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi. The questionnaire was trial tested using 30 girls from secondary schools that were not part of the sampled population. The data collected was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Correlation Coefficient which yielded 0.83. The coefficient which yielded 0.83 indicated high internal consistency which proved that the instrument was reliable to be used for field work. The data collected was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. A mean cut-off point of 2.50 was used for decision making. Any mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted as having the desired influence while any mean score below 2.50 was rejected as not having influence. The research hypotheses were tested using chi-square test of goodness of fit at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One: What is the influence of girl-child education on the political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State?

The data that provided answer to the research question are presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Influence of Girl-Child Education on Political Emancipation

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	ST.D	Decision
1.	Educating the girl-child makes them participate actively in politics of their constituency	167	181	49	53	3.03	0.98	Accepted
2.	Politically, the girl-child who I educated is relegated to the background in the society	208	154	60	28	3.20	0.90	Accepted
3.	Girls who are educated partake in vital decisions that affect their lives and that of their entire society	305	103	24	18	3.54	0.77	Accepted
4.	Educated girls also contest for elections into various positions which makes them have a stake in the policy formulation of their constituency	253	151	31	15	3.43	0.76	Accepted
5.	The education of the girl-child has bearing on the political development of the nation	191	173	59	27	3.17	0.88	Accepted
Cluster mean/Standard Deviations						3.27	0.86	Accepted

Dr. R. C. Odeh and Ezekiel Dondo Ivagher

Data presented on Table 1 showed that the mean ratings of items 2-6 are 3.03, 3.20, 3.54, 3.43, and 3.17 with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.98, 0.90, 0.77, 0.76 and 0.88 respectively.

All the mean ratings are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that educating the girl-child makes them participate actively in politics of their constituency. Politically, the girl-child who I educated is relegated to the background in the society. Girls who are educated partake in vital decisions that affect their lives and that of their entire society. Moreso, educated girls also contest for elections into various positions which make them have a stake in the policy formulation of their constituency and that the education of the girl-child has bearing on the political development of the nation. The cluster mean of 3.27 with the standard deviation of 0.86 were also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that girl-child education influence the political emancipation of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Research Question Two: How does girl-child education influence the economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State?

The data that provided answer to the research question are presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Influence of Girl-Child Education on the Economic Empowerment

Item No	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	X	ST.D	Decision
6.	Girl-child education raises the economic productive capacity of the nation which helps to reduce poverty and hunger.	273	99	69	19	3.41	0.82	Accepted
7.	Educated women contribute immensely to the economic achievement of their families and the nation at large	161	185	72	32	3.06	0.90	Accepted
8.	Education and training for girls and women help in achieving sustainable development and economic growth of a nation	269	101	56	24	3.37	0.90	Accepted
9.	Total neglect of girls education will make it difficult for a nation to fully develop economically	310	111	18	11	3.60	0.68	Accepted
10.	Girl-child education has bearing on the economic wellbeing of the people	223	180	34	13	3.36	0.75	Accepted
Cluster mean/Standard Deviations						3.36	0.81	Accepted

Girl-Child Education And The Development Of Zone C Senatorial District Of Benue State, Nigeria

Data presented on Table 2 showed that the mean ratings of items 7-11 are 3.41, 3.06, 3.37, 3.60, and 3.36 with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.82, 0.90, 0.90, 0.68 and 0.75 respectively.

All the mean ratings are above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that girl-child education raises the economic productive capacity of the nation which helps to reduce poverty and hunger. Educated women contribute immensely to the economic achievement of their families and the nation at large. Education and training for girls and women help in achieving sustainable development and economic growth of a nation. Moreso, total neglect of girls' education will make it difficult for a nation to fully develop economically and that girl-child education has bearing on the economic wellbeing of the people. The cluster mean of 3.36 with the standard deviations of 0.81 was also found to be above the cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that girl-child education influence the economic empowerment of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Testing Research Hypotheses

In testing the four hypotheses of this study, the chi-square test of goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance and the results are presented on table 3 to 4.

Research Hypothesis One: Girl-child education has no significant influence on political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Table 3: Chi-square Test of the Influence of Girl-Child Education on Political Emancipation

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	X ^{2-cal}	X ^{2-tab}	Decision
No Influence	86(19%)	225(50%)	1	0.05	188.31	3.84	
Influence	282(81%)	225(50%)					Rejected

Values in parentheses are percentages { $x^2 = 188.31, df = 1, p = 0.05 > 0.00$ }
 Table 3 showed that, the descriptive and inferential statistics of percentages and chi-square were used to test the null hypothesis that girl-child education has no significant influence on political emancipation in Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. The results showed that 81% of the respondents agreed that girl-child education has significant influence on political emancipation in Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Dr. R. C. Odeh and Ezekiel Dondo Ivagher

State as against 19% respondents who disagreed. The result also showed that the chi-square calculated value of 188.31 was greater than the chi-square table value of 3.84 checked at 0.05 level of significance and at 1 degree of freedom. The hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that girl-child education has significant influence on political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Research Hypothesis Two: Girl-child education has no significant influence on the economic empowerment of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State

Table 4: Chi-square Test of the Influence of Girl-Child Education on the Economic Empowerment

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{tab}	Decision
No Influence	78(17%)	225(50%)	1	0.05	326.57	3.84	
Influence	372(83%)	225(50%)					Rejected

Values in parentheses are percentages { $\chi^2 = 326.52$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.05 > 0.00$ }

Table 4 showed that the descriptive and inferential statistics of percentages and chi-square were used to test the null hypothesis that girl-child education has no significant influence on the economic empowerment of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. The results showed that 83% of the respondents agreed that girl-child education has significant influence on the economic empowerment of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State as against 17% respondents who disagreed. The result also showed that the chi-square calculated value of 326.52 was greater than the chi-square table value of 3.84 checked at 0.05 level of significance and at 1 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that girl-child education has significant influence on the economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study revealed that girl-child education has significant influence on political emancipation of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. This finding agrees with the views of Ballara (2000) when he observed the importance of the girl-child education in social development, as the education of the girl child has bearing on the economic well-being of a community, and when the girl child is academically qualified and grows into a woman, she will contribute to the political development of her nation. He further states that when the girl-child is

Girl-Child Education And The Development Of Zone C Senatorial District Of Benue State, Nigeria

academically qualified and grows into a woman, she will contribute to the political development of his society by and large

The second finding of this study is that girl-child education has significant influence on the economic empowerment of the people of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State. This finding agrees with the views of Kobani (2014) who states that, a woman's literacy increases productivity and self-employment in the informal sector. For example, the girl-child may become active participants in all stages of the productive chain, i.e. hoeing, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and threshing of grains, storage and distribution of goods need to be educated to increase productivity and their incomes.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that girl-child education has significant influence on political emancipation and economic empowerment of Zone C Senatorial District of Benue State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should make provision for educational materials, school meals, uniforms, to make free education truly free to girls from poor homes so as to help increase women active participation in politics.
2. Parents and guidance should give their female children education and stop the imposition of early marriage on them so that the girls will also have active role to play as regards the economic growth of the nation.

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Dr. R. C. Odeh and Ezekiel Dondo Ivagher

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