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**Emerging Issues in Girl Child Education in Nigeria:
Challenges of the 21st Century**

By

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Abstract

This paper discusses emerging issues in Girl-child Education and draws attention to the poor perception towards the education of the Girl-child in Nigeria. It also highlights the factors hindering successful achievement of Girl-child education in the 21st century; which include: improper perception of government institutions, retrogressive cultural practices, poverty and negative attitudes. The paper concludes by outlining the ways through which we can achieve success in Girl-child Education, among which are; that the public should change its attitudes towards the needs and aspirations of girls for a desirable education and that our educational institutions should provide free and safe educational environment that would favourably meet the needs of the girl-child and her unique peculiarities.

Introduction

The education of the Girl-child is becoming a subject of great concern among educators today. There is a growing concern over the present trend in the education of the girl-child and or women in general. This concern gained impetus in the wake of the concern over sustainable human resources, managing and promoting collective health, as well as the general well being of individuals in the world today. In Nigeria, our educational planners tend to have overlooked the issue of girls and women education. This is in spite of the loud objectives of the Universal Basic Education. The general lack of emphasis on the Girl-child education in Nigeria's educational system showcases the statutory weakness of the policy and education programme in the country. What obtains under the broad umbrella known as the Universal Basic Education should have stressed

the need for Girls and women education in recognition of the social needs of women in our society. However, the issue of the neglect of female education is not peculiar to Nigeria; many developing countries have such problems. Even though, it is generally believed that education is the foundation for the development of the physical, mental, moral, political, social and technological aspects of human life, there is still a general lack of emphasis on girl-child education by most developing Nations of the world today. The realization of the value of education requires that all the subjects will be provided educational life chances, devoid of gender discrimination or bias.

The global community has spoken emphatically in favour of the liberation and promotion of women by giving them the right and desirable type of education. This is to objectively make them useful contributors to the constructive development of their homes and the nation at large. As a result of this, Nigeria introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE 1976) and now Universal Basic Education (UBE 1999) in order to cater for the growing needs of education in the country. This came as a result of the resolutions in conferences and meetings held at different places and countries that were directed at providing education for all. Yet, it is sad to note that girl-child education in most African Nations, like Nigeria, is still not as it should be.

Some of these important conferences and meetings that noted this fact were the World Summit for Children, 1992 and the International Conference on Assistance to African Child, 1992. Many more of these types of conferences were held the world over and they are all in line with the effort of providing

education for both boys and girls on equal footing. The imperatives outlined by most of the conferences are on the social, economical and political awareness of women and girl -child education. Presently, the need for women education in our society has become so obvious and this need is very acute. In addition, the relevance of girl-child education in the contemporary society is growing higher every day. To Prasad and Kaushik (2007), there is the urgent need to train females for social and occupational roles, which are vital to their personality and relevant to various categories of professions. Some of the problems facing women and girls in their quest for education include among others, their limited opportunities in terms of access to education and the fact that they are being trapped by socio-cultural factors of various social institutions and cultural settings in the society, such as marriage, religion and the family.

Nigeria’s Perception of Girl Child Education

The slogan “education for the girl-child” was coined in order to ensure that women occupy their position and enjoy all the educational privileges provided by Nigeria’s educational system. The attempt was geared towards salvaging the plight of women by providing them with opportunities for education and thereby correcting the imbalance in terms of the provision of educational facilities and accessibility between male and female Education in different parts of the country. The quest for enhanced women education has attracted the efforts of various women organization, agencies and ministries of education at Local, State and Federal Governments levels. Alao (1998), observed that apart from the provisions made for women education in the

National Policy on Education, governments and agencies at various levels had taken steps towards improving and providing better education for girls or women. These efforts have resulted in the establishment of full fledged women educational institutions at the three tiers of governments. That is why in the Federal Ministry of Education, there is a section that concerns women education. It was established and was charged with the following responsibilities:

- Provision of more educational opportunities for girls and enabling them have more chances or access to primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- Creating awareness among the citizenry, with a view to convincing the general public about government provision for equal opportunities in education irrespective of gender, age, locality, creed or social status. And that this is to be made available to all within affordable means.
- Re-orientating women and creating attitudinal change among women concerning education through the provision of adequate information and guidance.
- Provision of functional education for girls and women in skills such as sewing, cooking, baking, typing, knitting, typing, and dying. This should also include the consideration for various cultural traits and social status of the individual.
- Awakening the consciousness of all women irrespective of their socio-cultural differences to the need for the development of a positive self

image towards society and education.

- Promoting the education of girls and women in the fields of Science, Technology and Mathematics due to the conviction that these courses are relevant to the demands and needs of girls and women in the society.

In addition to the above, the Universal Basic Education is said to have an overwhelming influence over the Girl-child education. In spite of the numerous efforts towards improving Girl-child education in Nigeria, there is still a dire need for greater national recognition and assistance. It is pertinent to note that there are still higher intakes of girls at the lower level of the educational ladder than it obtains at the higher level. The number continues to dwindle as the girls climb up to the higher ladder. It is also pertinent to note that Girl-child education is that nature of education given to the girls which is necessary for their social, physical, psychological and emotional development without undue considerations to gender. (Aggarwal 2006).

The education that should be given in our society to girls should be equal to that which is given to every child in the country. This has not been so due to certain peculiarities in girls as well as the social, economic challenges that confront them. There is therefore, the need for this kind of education to receive special considerations so as to change the status quo. Happy enough, the National Policy on Education, agitates that; it would provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child in Nigeria. It also hopes to drastically reduce drop out rate by employing learner-friendly methodology that would take into account the life style of rural dwellers and that of the urban

settlers. This means that the curriculum would be flexible such that it would be culturally oriented and socially friendly. It further promises that every Nigerian child shall have the right to education and this shall be functional education for the promotion of progressive and united Nigeria. It further states that, there shall be no variation or discrepancies in educational provision, and distribution of educational facilities. This means that henceforth, all will benefit from this education initiative (FGN, 2004).

Across the country, the nature of girl-child education is influenced by different values and other attributes of culture. It is against this background that the pattern of educating girls in various parts of Nigeria differs, yet this receives great value, recognition and is being promoted by government and other agencies (FGN, 2004).

The Government and Girl-child Education

The development of feminine qualities needed to fulfil contemporary social responsibilities and expected roles of women is rooted in the present system of education. Educating girls can make these expectations more certain. The government has made various efforts towards the education of girls and women, some of these efforts include:

- The Nairobi proposal, which sets the mechanisms for redressing the educational imbalances between boys and girls in 1987. Sequel to this, the government began to recognize education as a basic tool that will give girls and women full opportunity to identify themselves as members of society. These objectives were outlined as follows:

- a. Providing more educational opportunities for girls in primary, post primary and tertiary institutions of learning.
 - b. Female education should be given to orient and re-orient the attitude of life irrespective of age. This it is to achieve a high value of education and to promote education of girls and women in the field of Science, Technology and Mathematics.
- Women education branches were established in the Federal, States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Ministries of Education. Similarly, model centres were established for the purpose of skill acquisition by women and they were well equipped.
 - Training centres were provided for women and girls to acquire knowledge, skills and learn income generating mechanisms. The introduction of basic literacy facilities for both and promotion of women centres for continuing education for women and girls who dropped out; this is applicable to women in various categories of learning.

Muhammad(1999),states that:

In the Northern part of Nigeria compulsory education was adopted. In many parts of Nigeria, especially in the Northern states like Bauchi, Kano, Niger, Sokoto, Adamawa, Yobe and Jigawa, laws were enacted preventing the withdrawal of girls from school. Federal Government Girls Colleges have been established in all states of the Federation including FCT to promote education of the Girl-child (P.80).

Factors affecting Girl-child Education in 21st century Nigeria

In spite of the fact that education is considered as a tool for National development and that development is an effort of both sexes in society, the status of the Girl-child education is still suffering drudgery instead of having a noble acceptance by other members of the various communities. Girl-child education is a social and human pursuit for self-sacrifice, a tool for personal and social development in the society and a means to promote the power to shape the society (Prasad and Kaushik, 2007). The nation is faced with deplorable and destitute kind of Girl-child education. This is due to the long conservative cultural attitudes, which has for some time now led to the suffering of multitudes of young girls under neglect. This has resulted in a number of setbacks on their educational life chances and access. The problems of Girl-child education in Nigeria are historically, socially, economically and culturally rooted. Perhaps, the discriminatory cultural practices, religious bias and misinterpretation of modern or western education and socio-economic status of parents affect Girl-child education. These have affected both the process of access and retention to education by girls/women. There are other factors affecting Girl-child education, these include:

- Rampant hawking, excess domestic chores and subordinating younger siblings to care for the elderly folks, and poverty hinder their chances for schooling in rural areas.
- Long distance trekking and distances of school affects enrolment and distracts regular attendance of both young and adult classes.

- Institutions of the society especially those with strong ties, to tradition and the economy, encourage people to view education of the Girl child as a waste or misplacement of resources. This constitutes the notion of upward strengthening of the male child at the expense of the female counterpart.
- The curriculum and text books, coupled with other instructional materials are male friendly and dominating in terms of references, examples and social interaction with teaching and learning environment.

In summary, methodological approaches toward women education in the present 21st century are found wanting. Extreme cultural practices in rural and traditional settings in Nigeria and indeed in the North, coupled with severe poverty do have far reaching negative consequences on the girl-child education. These constraints are the factors against modern educational attainment and educational chances of girls. That is why Aggarwal (2006) quoted Rousseau that: "the education of woman is meant to train the man". Women require education for prosperity of manners. A woman who is literate is a pride to her husband, children and family and to the indigenous culture. Education is therefore necessary for the woman if she would ever overcome her social constraints. This necessitates the development of educational policies that would integrate and favour women to have access to education that would make them surmount cultural, religious and other constraints that limit their chances of getting education.

Suggested Measures for improving Girl-child Education

- With regards to the issue of economic backwardness as a hindrance to educational attainment of the girl-child, in both rural and urban areas, the following are suggested; free uniforms, books, mid-day meals and scholarships. These should serve as compensation to the parents of girl-child in all educational institution.
- The public should be enlightened concerning the issue of educating the girl-child. Some of the issues, which need to be addressed that concern the public are: separate schools for girls, issues of providing school mothers to cater for girl-child, school clinics with adequate health facilities and professionals such as, female nurses and health attendants.
- School facilities should be made available and be provided in inadequate quantities in the backward areas and in minority communities for the education of the girl-child.

Conclusion

Nigeria in the 21st century is faced with global competitive educational demand and shortage of manpower, especially on the part of females. This led to imbalances in social, economic and political chances. These factors therefore demand the turnover of educational provision to curtail these problems. There is the need to address these issues in such a way that it would help enhance the social security of the girls and women and promote literacy that will enhance productivity. Indeed education is a magic wand for the general well being of human beings.

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