



## Girl Child Education: Strategy to National Development

OGUNYOMI Asisat Ajoke (RN, BNSc)

Department of Nursing  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

OHAERI, Beatrice (RN, Ph.D)

Department of Nursing  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

OJO, Iyanuoluwa O. (RN, Ph.D)

Department of Nursing  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

BABARIMISA, Oluwatoyin (RN, M.Sc.)

Department of Nursing  
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

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### Abstract

Girl child education has been recognized as an important way to national development. Girl child will become wife, mother, worker, leader depending on how she is able to maximize her potential. Globally, issue of girl child education has caught the attention of many stakeholders due to the inequality and marginalization the gender are facing as far as education is concerned. The problem is seen mostly in underdeveloped and developing nations mostly in Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Child marriage, child labour, poor policy implementation regarding girl child education, poverty among others have been identified as the barrier to girl child education. There is need for women empowerment, good policy implementation; scholarship for girl child education should be put in place for them to benefit maximally from all round education. Countries with good number of educated and literate women have fewer maternal and infant mortality, increase GDP and economic growth, peaceful co-existence, decrease domestic violence and many others. Government and parent should rise up to their responsibility to bridge this gap of inequality for female to contribute towards nation building.

**Keywords:** Girl-Child Education, Strategy, National Development

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### I. Introduction

I am always moved to tears whenever I see young girls pregnant (either by mistakes, raped or intended) and are sick as a result of unprotected sex which may eventually truncate the education of the girls while those boys that got them pregnant will continue their studies. In other words, the girl child is always at the receiving end. In some cases the child given birth to cannot be adequately taken care of let alone attend school, thus, the vicious cycle of poverty beings continues as the case maybe. It is against this background that I consider girl-child education as an important tool for national development. Training up of children is the duty of parents whether educated formally or not, particularly, moral upbringing is very important in any home. It is assumed that educated parents would give both formal and informal education to their girl-child and even take them to educational heights as high as the universities, but some uneducated parents will probably not see any reason for formal education of the girl-child.

The vulnerability of the adolescent girls is profound. The girl-child often faces discrimination from the earliest stages of life, through childhood and into adulthood. Her perceived low status is reflected in the denial of fundamental needs and rights coupled with harmful attitudes and practices such as a preference for sons, early

marriage, female genital mutilation, domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, less access to education and a host of other reproductive health challenges. The fourth world conference on women in Beijing 1995, identified the persistent discrimination against the girl-child and the violation of her rights as one of the 12 critical areas of concerns requiring urgent attention by government and the international community. The factors acclaimed to be hindrances to the effectiveness of girl-child education in the community are limited finance, father's careless attitude, early pregnancy, girl-child laziness and the perception that girl child is a liability.

Girl child education has been identified as an important aspect of their life of which they have been suffered discrimination and these has affected their life in so many ways ranges from child marriage, child labour, gender based violence, gender stereotyping, teenage pregnancy among others. Education is a fundamental human right not a privileged nor luxury, aside right to life, right to education give girls an immense opportunities to acquire knowledge, discover their talents and maximize their potentials there by contribute meaningfully to their immediate family, community and the country at large. This has been confirmed by the convention on the right of children and convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) According to UNESCO in 2018, globally there were 64 million out-of-school children of primary school age (about 6 to 11 years). 34 million of those children were girls. An estimated 130 million girls in total were out of both primary and secondary school. (Sydney Schultz, 2019) In South and West Asia, 80% of out-of-school girls are unlikely ever to start school, compared to just 16% of boys. Forty per cent of Nigerian children aged 6-11 do not attend any primary school with the Northern region recording the lowest school attendance rate in the country, particularly for girls, believe that women are second class citizens, senior secondary school was nearly forty one percent out of the school (Statista, 2021).

According to World Bank girl child education goes beyond getting girls into school, it is also about ensuring that girls learn and feel safe while in school, have the opportunity to complete all levels of education, acquiring the knowledge and skills to compete in the labour market, gain social and emotional life skill necessary to navigate and adapt to a changing world, make decision about their own life and contribute to their communities and the world ( World Bank 2021)"The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is the education goal. It aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." SDG 4 is made up of 10 targets with target 1:" ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes". "The provision of 12 years of free, publicly-funded, inclusive, equitable, quality primary and secondary education – of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes – should be ensured for all, without discrimination". The responsibilities lie on the family, government and other relevant stakeholders to bridge the gap of this inequality so as to benefit from future educated generations.

### **Concept of the Girl-Child**

The term 'girl-child' refers to a female that falls between the ages of 6-18 years (**Osakinle & Adegoroye, 2007**). The National Child Welfare Policy (1989) as cited by Undiyaundeye (2012) sees the girl-child as a female below 14 years of age. **Offorma (2009)** in his paper asserted that a girl child is a biological young female from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person who would definitely grow into a woman and marry.

A girl child is a female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age that precede young adult. This period covers infancy, toddlerhood, preschool and school age from primary school to secondary, the age group also includes pre pubertal and puberty stage otherwise known as teenage or adolescents' years. During this childhood period, the girl is majorly under the guidance of her parent, a guardian or her older siblings who works together as her agent of socialization (Proshare, 2018). This period is also characterized by rapid physical, mental, spiritual, social and emotional growth when the child is given better and enabling environment at this period there is possibility of future success if otherwise the problem may emerge which will hinder her success in life. Knowledge learn at this stage is permanent, has been likened to the mark made on the rock.

The position of the girl-child in the family and the society at large has biological and historical antecedents. Buttressing this fact, Osakinle and Akeredolu (2019) observed that the girl-child, and indeed women the world over, especially in Africa and Nigeria, have had their destiny sealed from birth by tradition and culture on account of their sex. Continuing, Osakinle and Akeredolu (2019) disclosed that they have been called the weaker sex in order to justify societal discrimination and oppression against them. They must remain silent hewers of wood and drawers of water, bearers of children, and toilers of arduous labour from sun-rise to sun-down. They can be seen but not to be heard in both the private and the public spheres of decision making. The girl-child by the natural status ascribed to her by male-defined norms of societal conduct and behaviour remains a property to be owned and commoditized. Consequently her rights appear to be circumscribed by tradition, custom, and the chauvinism of male patriarchy in most cultures.

Unanam (2020) believes that girl-child have always been a marginalized category. This is due to the fact that they do not control the means of production. As a result, they fall behind their male counterparts. Girl-child has always been on the receiving end of our cultural and religious practices, sex roles, and societal constructs, which have had a significant impact on them from their origin. Undiyaundeye (2012) asserts that one gender is consistently discriminated against as a result of social structure flaws, resulting in inequities in access to societal social services, resources, property, and wealth, culminating in gender stratification. This influence emphasizes the reality that women have been mostly excluded from the processes that will help them achieve self-actualization and economic empowerment. Where these are lacking, poverty results, which creates barriers that prohibit most women from realizing their full potential, resulting in a violation of their fundamental rights (Osakinle, Alokun & Ayodele, 2015).

A consequence of the above scenario is that right from birth the girl-child is placed on an unequal position with the male child thus putting her chances and extent of possible life achievement in jeopardy. One major area this unequal treatment is manifest is in the area of formal education. Without education the girl child suffers. This is aptly summarized by Galbreath (2012) when he noted that without school, no job; without job, no husband, and no beautiful clothes. This position is supported by Ayuk (2012) when he stated that lack of access to education is indeed the end of the world, because without it there is certainly no future for the girl-child in the strict sense of full inclusion and participation in the development process, self-actualization, self-fulfilment and personal freedom.

### **Concept of Education**

Hanson and Bremler in **Osakinle (2006)** say education (general) is the means through which human feeling acquire the civilization of the past and are enabled to take part in the civilization of the future. The process of education occurs wherever any influence produces a change in the physical or mental behavior of any person.

According to Wikipedia "Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, habits, and personal development. Educational methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators; however, learners can also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings, and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. Education can be formal, informal and non-formal. Formal education is a planned, well-structured program with step by step developed syllabus that is age related taught in a formal setting like classroom. Formal education starts from primary through secondary and tertiary institution of learning. Teaching is usually done by professional teachers who are knowledgeable in their various fields. They are there to impact knowledge to learners or students. There is promotion from one grade to another based on performance of learners during assessment or examination period. Formal education also characterized by award of certificate at the completion of studies which usually serve as prerequisite to another higher level of learning.

Informal education: This is a continuous, lifelong learning which does not require formal setting like school it include parent teaching their children various value and norms of the society, household chores practice, peer teaching, self-learning like reading novels, textbook magazines, internet searching for information . Knowledge is acquired basically through observation, conversation, repetition and exploration. It is neither planned nor structured. For non-formal education, UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2021) defined it as the education that is institutionalized, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It is often provided to guarantee the right of access to education for all. It caters for people of all ages, but does not necessarily apply a continuous pathway-structure; it may be short in duration and/or low intensity, and it is typically provided in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education mostly leads to qualifications that are not recognized as formal qualifications by the relevant national educational authorities or to no qualifications at all. Non-formal education can cover programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development.

### **Virtues of Girl Child Education**

Educating girls has been associated with many benefits among these are:

1. **Future educated generation;** An African proverb says, "If we educate a boy, we educate one person. If we educate a girl, we educate a family and a whole nation." Educated girl will ensure her children also get educated, iron sharpens iron. You can only give what you have. She can assist her children in their school homework and prepare them for success in their education. Nursing and Teaching as a female dominated profession in an indication of the benefits of girl child education. Nurses are the largest professionals in the health team while teachers are nation builders (UNICEF, 2011)

2. **Decrease infant mortality:** Children of educated women are less likely to die before their first year. She knows the importance of immunization against killer diseases, she can easily recognize the danger signs in her children and when to seek medical aids, educated women know the right type of food to give her children for proper growth and development all these will prevent infant morbidity and mortality also girls who receive education is less likely to contract HIV & AIDS, and thus, less likely to pass it onto their children. (UNFPA, 2018, UN AIDS Gap Report, 2014)

3. **Decrease maternal mortality:** Educated women with greater knowledge of health care are less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. She seeks medical help through antenatal care during pregnancy, she is knowledgeable about birth preparedness and complication readiness, she knows danger signs of pregnancy and also have good knowledge of how to navigate pregnancy journey to have favourable outcome. Girl child education has been associated with improve socioeconomic growth with an increase in nation gross domestic product. According to World Bank 2012, women with a secondary school education will earn twice as much, on average, as women without an education. Nation with uneducated girls has a chance of losing between \$15 and \$30 trillion in productivity and earnings. More so, educated women will break the cycle of poverty, leading healthier and more productive lives, and raising the standard of living for their children, families, and communities and nation in general.

4. **Increase involvement in political process:** Educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making which favours them. They know better solution to their problem. Maryam Babangida Better Life for Rural Women signifies the importance of girl child education. She started the program to help the marginalized and vulnerable rural African nation's women. The program also aimed to reduce maternal and child mortality rate by ensuring access to basic healthcare facilities for women, provide them with income generating opportunities through agriculture and cottage industries, educational training and integration of rural women into national development plans.

5. **Coping better with life eventualities:** Experience has shown that resettlement after displacement from war zones have been championed by women. A 2010 World Bank study of developing countries from 1960 to 2003 found that countries with higher levels of female schooling were less likely to suffer high rates of death, injury, and displacement due to weather disasters. According to Michelle Obama "No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens."

6. **Decrease domestic & sexual violence:** Education liberates women by offering them courage and independence to make decisions that positively affects their lives. She knows signs of domestic violence or intimate partner violence and knows whom to contact when such happens (Ajay Singh, 2021)

### **Barriers to Girl Child Education**

A number of factors have been identified by several studies (Undiyaundeye, 2012; Osakinle & Adegoroye, 2007) as the factors militating against girl child education. Undiyaundeye (2012) surmises that the access of women to education is very low and this is attributed to the concept of women, especially in developing countries, as chattels to be owned by men, socio-cultural beliefs and practices like early marriage and early pregnancy, initiations into adulthood of teenagers (where they obtain) and male preference which is common among most African countries, poverty which forces girls already in school out of school and into teenage marriage. Some of these factors will be discussed below:

(a) **Poverty:** According to Osakinle and Adegoroye (2007), poverty and economic issues, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, inadequate school infrastructure and cultural and religious misinterpretation are the main issues that prevent girls from going to school. With almost 70% of the Nigerian population living below the poverty line, girls are often sent to work in the markets or hawk wares on the streets. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy also prevent girls from going to school. A lot of girls drop out of school before reaching primary class six. To Oleribe (2007), parental economic poverty is blamed as a major cause of girl child non-education. Today, poverty and HIV pandemic – the greatest crisis in the world – and its inadequate global response have their greatest impact on children, especially girls. However, although poverty has a role to play, one can comfortably say that non-girl child education is also a cause of poverty. So they are intertwined in an unholy cycle, causing and perpetuating each other.

(b) **Lack of adequate infrastructure:** Most schools lack adequate classroom space, furniture and equipment, and are often too remotely located. Water, health and sanitation facilities are usually inadequate while pupil-teacher ratios could be as high as 1:100 in urban slums (UNICEF, 2007). Many Nigerian parents, especially in large families with limited resources, enroll their boys in school rather than girls. Some parents also keep their daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of Islamic religion (UNICEF, 2007). Absence of standard learning centres, deficiency of qualified teachers and drought of study materials have over the years prevented the few lucky girl-children, allowed to acquire formal education from obtaining the best; majority leave school worse than when they entered.



(c) Lack of opportunities: Boys are generally known to be given more opportunities to ask and answer questions, to use learning materials, and to lead groups. It appears that girls are often given less time on task than boys in primary and secondary school science classes. Many Nigerian teachers still use corporal punishment and create an intimidating classroom environment. By 2005, only 29% (UNICEF, 2007) of all primary school teachers held the minimum certificate of education qualification mandated by the government. In this way, the quality of teaching remains low.

(d) Culture: Over the years, the role of females in Nigerian society has been erroneously conceptualized to child bearing and housekeeping (Oleribe, 2007). This is why, in most developing countries males are groomed for career in technical and scientific fields while females are guided to concentrate their efforts on home economics. In Nigeria, the social relations and activities of Nigerian women and men are governed by patriarchal system of socialization and cultural practices, which favour the interest of men above those of women. The women are in subordinate position particularly at the community and household levels and the male children are preferred to the females (Oleribe, 2007; Salman, Olawoye, & Yahaya, 2011). The consideration of the girl-child education as secondary to that of boys in some societies and in some religious set up, could also be responsible for the wastage rate among females at all levels of education. Further, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) identified poverty, early marriage and teenage pregnancy; inadequate school infrastructure; cultural and religious biases; gender bias in content and teaching and learning processes; poorly qualified teachers among others as some of the barriers to girl-child education.

(e) Fear of sexual harassment and molestation: Parents and guardians deny their girl children access to schools because of their fear of sexual molestations of all kinds. Also their lack of trust on these innocent child make them prevent them from attending such schools, since they are not sure what 'evils' they will get involved in. The fact that majority of teachers are males have not helped issues at all (Norani, 2008 & Faye, 2010).

### **Strategies to Girl Child Education**

When people are empowered, they can do tasks with ease. Education, both official and informal, is one way to empower people. Education and empowerment are inextricably related. Aside from being an important component of any empowerment packages, education also serves as an empowerment process. People who are illiterate, as well as those who are physically handicapped, such as the blind and hearing impaired, require education. When people with disabilities, such as the hearing impaired, are educated, they are able to communicate their thoughts via sign language. This empowering measure encourages children to communicate with persons who are not deafeningly deaf. Within their families and communities, their opinions are heard and respected in decision-making. They are empowered to become productive members of their economies after completing this empowerment process (Brenyah, 2018).

Illiterate persons, according to Agu (2007), are empowered to gain a feeling of their own agency as learners and "meaning builders". Individuals and groups benefit from education as a method of empowerment (majority and minority). Another author, Ezema (2009), expands on Agu's argument that education as a means of empowerment can sometimes have varied empowerment potentials for different people, particularly in settings when there is a dominating group and a minority group (Brenyah, 2018).

Empowerment can relate to both a fundamental shift at the individual level and a more representational change at the communal level, according to various schools of thought. Divergent viewpoints on this claim have been noted. Griffin, for example, has stated that fundamental transformation at the individual level will result in fundamental social change. In another instance, educating and empowering women is critical. Dr. Kwagyiri Aggrey's old adage that "when you educate a guy, you teach one individual, but when you educate a girl, you educate a nation" is still relevant. Because women keep the home and care for children, current evidence demonstrates that social interventions that offer women with possibilities for improved education and well-being have an impact on many individuals. As underlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, empowering women in education is founded on human rights and is a crucial tool for achieving equality (Oluyemi and Yinusa, 2016). Some of the strategies to ensure girl-child education include:

1. Community sensitization, mobilization and involvement in the planning, monitoring and implementation of girl child education.
2. Relevant stakeholders like civil society organization, women organization religious leaders and peer group education trainers among others should be involved.
3. Child Right Act should be strengthen and ensured that it is implemented in all states, so as to curb child abuse and gender disparity, violators of the right should also be prosecuted. (Shrikant Dadhitch, 2021).
4. Government can also subsidized or make girl child education totally free, free school uniform, free feeding should also be employed. There should be prosecution for parent whose children are found hawking or roaming about in the street during school hours

5. Banning of social media on the demeaning and shameless images of girls and women in the media and advertising and replace it with morally guided message about virtues and important of females in the society.

6. Many parents worry about girls travelling long distances on their own. Many parents also prefer to have daughters taught by women. Home schooling should be planned where need be

7. Learning materials should be relevant to the needs of girls and be in the local language. Gender stereotypes should be avoided, girls can also be the class leader if she has what it takes e.g. if she is the most brilliant in class.

### **Tomorrow of the Girl-Child**

Education is one of the fundamental right of the girl-child. This education that the girl-child deserves is expected to be given to her by herself, her family, her country and her people. If the girl-child is educated, there is every chance that she will scale through the effect of teenage pregnancy and probably rape which was seen by Undiyaundeye (2012) to have a devastating effect on the parents and ambition or career of the girl-child as he posits that “a Pregnant girl face the trauma of parents and peers showdown. Here some parents themselves become angry and fail to give support for the preservation of the girl and the unborn baby. For their peers and other people, they most times fault the girl and her family of non-challant and disgraceful disposition and putting the aforementioned in disrepute. For the girls’ life, the trauma is multiple: loss of respect from friends and associates and the frustration is also more from rejection by parents and even the boy who is responsible for the pregnancy and his parents most times. All these can be equally avoided if the girl is given the chance to be educated.

There are lots of females who have been and who are still on top and are well involved in the affairs of the country. Some famous are also in reputable position a lot of institutions, private and government parastatals in Nigeria and even abroad few of these are Former President of Liberia and Malawi, President Ellen Sir leaf and Joyce Banda respectively. Former Chief Justice of the Federation Justice Mariam Aloma Mukhtar from July 2012 to November 2014” assumed office when the image and integrity of the judiciary were at the lowest ebb. She declared a zero tolerance for corruption in the system and pursues the cause tenaciously; Justice Mukhtar made an impact that will form the basis for further action by her successor “.Justice Mahmud Muhammad. Mary Slessor put an end to killing of twins in Calabar. Late Professor Mrs. Dora Akunyili former NAFDAC Chairman reshaped the food and drug industry to ensure safety of the Nigerian. Dr. Mrs. Okonjo Iweala and Professor Ruqayat Rufai, who both formally manned the topmost sector of the Nigeria economy Finance minister and Education respectively

Others are; Kemi Adeosun(*Ex Minister of Finance*), OkonjoIweale(*Ex-Minister of Finance*), (Sola David-Borha (*CEO - Stanbic IBTC*), Professor Cecilia Igwilo(*West African First Female Professor of Pharmacy, UNILAG*), Professor (Mrs.) Adenike Osofisan(*Former Pioneer President, Nigeria Women in Information Technology and the First Female Professor of Computer Science in Africa*), Professor (Mrs.) Alele Williams (*The first Professor in Mathematics*), Professor Olabisi Ugbebor(*The Queen of Mathematics*) etc. If only these girl children can be given a chance to move away from that which will hamper or bring to an abrupt halt their education which is the only option for them to get to the top their future is assuredly brighter. The future of the girl-child will be good enough and worth seeing if she is made to be educated; this will give her a chance to be focused in life and become even much more successful than the aforementioned women.

## **II. Conclusion**

The girl child has long been overlooked and marginalized in the development process in the country due to a dependency culture that includes poverty, a lack of education, limited work prospects, and socio-cultural impediments, particularly in Nigeria. The need to educate the girl child is informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education. This is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women’s struggle to improve their status. The empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power and economic self-sustenance. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of positive change (National Policy on Education, 2004).

## **III. Recommendations**

Premised on the findings of the studies, the following recommendations were made;

- i. Policy makers and legislatures should enact bills that will make education mandatory for the girl-child throughout the country.

- ii. Teachers should objectively pass on knowledge to girl children, which is devoid of any religious or cultural coloration and harassment to the children.
- iii. Seminars, workshops and conferences should be organised from time to time to keep girl-children abreast of their rights and sexuality.
- iv. Also, in addressing the shortcomings of uneducated parents who shy away from giving education to their girl children, there should be education and provision of school-based day care and parenting centres for those parents. These strategies would provide viable and effective avenues for giving students a better chance to be educated as they would have every reason to complete their education.

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