

The Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Government Secondary Schools of Abuja, Nigeria – Implication for Counselling

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Abstract: *Girl-child education is very important for the overall development of a country. In Nigeria, most especially in the northern part, girls' enrollment into secondary schools is usually low compared to boys. Girls who enroll end up dropping out for various reasons like teenage pregnancy and early marriage, religious factors, socio-economic factors and school related factors. The focus of this paper is to investigate the challenges of our girls in Abuja, Nigeria viewing some government secondary schools of Abuja (FCT). The descriptive survey method was adopted for this study, using a clustered sampling method and simple random sampling procedure. Questionnaires were used for gathering information from the respondents who were teachers of four government secondary schools. 240 teachers responded to the administered questionnaires out of 960 teachers in the schools. Data was analyzed using percentages and bar charts. The enrollment rate of girls and boys in the four government secondary schools are almost the same. The drop out rate among girls is very minimal from the result. Poverty and poor academic performance are the highest barriers and obstacles to enrollment and also reasons for drop out of girls in the school. Teenage pregnancy and early marriage as a barrier is very low in this part of Abuja. It is recommended that counselors should identify indigent students, those classes with high enrollment and high dropout rate and help negotiate some form of incentives such as food, uniforms, books, scholarships and remedial classes for them. Also sensitization of the government, community, teachers and students on girl-child education.*

Keywords: *enrollment, dropout, girl-child, education, counselling*

I. INTRODUCTION

Girl-child education is the process through which the girl-child is made functional members of her society. It is a process through which the girl-child acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something good, something worthwhile (Ocho, 2005).

Two thirds of all those who have no access to education are girls and women. Sixty five million girls and women never even started school, and an estimated 100 million do not complete primary education, often because the quality is poor and their opportunities are far from equal to those of boys. More than 542 million women are illiterate, many as a result of inadequate or incomplete schooling. Nearly a billion of people cannot read and write and 300 million of our school-aged children are not in school. Two-thirds of those who cannot read and write are women, 60% of children not in school are girls, (Adetunde et al, 2008). Many countries still do not provide basic education for all children. Numerous students are not in school and those lucky enough to be enrolled in primary drop out before completion and the level

of achievement students attain is often low. These problems affect girls more than boys.

In Africa, for instance girl primary school enrolment accounts for only 57% of the school-age population, compared with 75% to boys (Adetunde et al, 2008). The right to education, which is a fundamental human right, is frequently denied to girls in some African countries. The then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, stated that in Africa, when families have to make a choice, due to limited resources, of educating either a girl or a boy child, it is always the boy that is chosen to attend school. In Africa, many girls are prevented from getting the education entitled to them because families often send their daughters out to work at a young age, so that they can get the additional income they may need to exist beyond subsistence level, and finance the education of sons.

Adamu (2005) views the neglect of female – child education as something that has to do with culture and religion, but Rufai (1996) attributes the neglect to various myths. Some of these include unfounded cultural beliefs that; educated female – child do not make submissive wives, promiscuous, are usually barren and carry attitudes that are incompatible with their traditionally expected roles as future wives and mothers. Such myths go further to say that educated women always insist on being on equal footing with their male

counterparts. Umar (1996), states that female – child particularly in the Northern Nigeria is made to believe that her place as a woman is in the kitchen and home and she is socialized into accepting her traditional role of bearing and rearing children and also maintaining the welfare of her family. As far as parents are concerned, there is no need for female – child to be prepared beyond attaining to such traditional roles of being mothers and wives. It can be understood that this restricted view of female – child education resulted in persistent lukewarm attitude towards exposing female-child to western education in the northern part of the country.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education which is the right of every child is a mirage in the lives of some Nigerian girls because they are forced into early marriage as from age 12 (Ocholi, 2002). Ocholi further observed that the regression in basic education is reflected in the fact that the net enrolment rate for girls is very low, with a high drop out rate. Poverty has been known to force most parents to withdraw their children from school. UNICEF (2004) report indicates that some 121 million children are out of school for various reasons and 65 million of them are girls. With the educational rights of 65 million girls unmet, something should be done to ensure that they complete their education. The same report indicates that Nigeria is one of the 25 developing countries of the world with low enrolment rates for girls, gender gap of more than 10% in primary education and with more than 1 million girls out of school. This is unfortunate, considering the multiplier and intergenerational benefits derivable from the education of the girl-child.

The issue of non availability of data is very disturbing to policy makers in education in Nigeria in the sense that some vital records needed are either not kept or at best poorly kept. This is quite noticeable at all levels of our educational system. It seems the majority of Nigerians don't keep records neither are they very willing to give out information for fear that such information might be used against them. Even in the schools, the needed information may not be found either because they have not been obtained by the school or they have been lost due to poor storage (Durosaro, 2011).

At the backdrop of the above statement of problems, it is the aim of this study, therefore, to find out the challenges of girl-child education in the government secondary schools of Abuja.

III. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

This aim has been achieved through the following specific objectives:

- ✓ To identify the challenges of the girl-child in government secondary schools of Abuja
- ✓ To identify the possible strategies for counseling

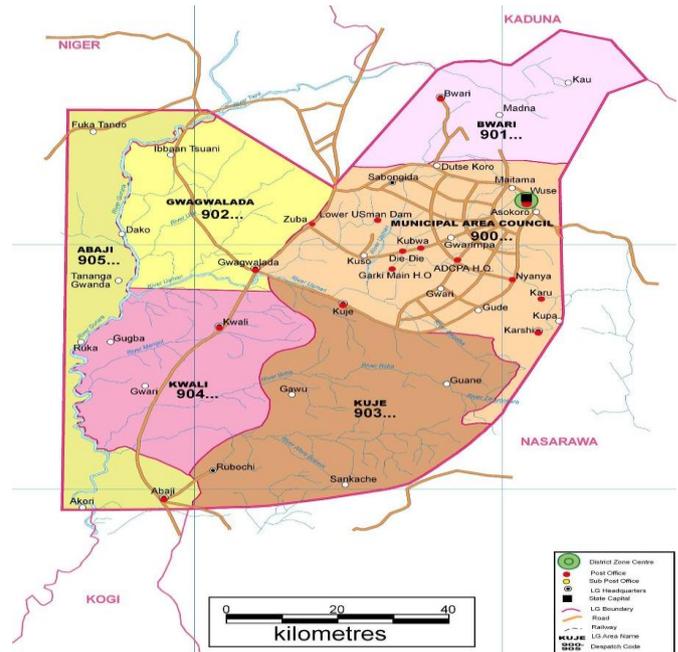


Figure 1: A Map of Abuja town showing the location of the government secondary schools for sampling

IV. METHODS

A Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. The study sought to know the challenges of the girl-child education in government secondary schools of the north-central region. In light of this topic, research was designed using clustered sampling method in which a simple random sampling was used to select the four schools clustered at the extreme end of Abuja town, sharing boundary with Nassarawa state. They are Government Secondary School Karshi, Government Secondary School Karu, in Abuja and Government Secondary School Jikwoyi and Government Secondary School Nyanya in the federal Capital Territory (See figure 1 above).

Purposive sampling was used to collect data from only the teachers of the government secondary schools. This method was used for the purpose of getting detailed information. Following the method of determining sample size by krejcie and Morgan (1970), in a population of 1000 a sample size of 278 is acceptable. The researcher administered 280 questionnaires but 240 were recovered after the survey.

THE MAIN POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FROM TEACHERS

- ✓ Creating a good rapport with the girl-child - having a regular talk show with girl-child in the school concerning their academics, career and personal problems will create room for the girl-child to express her problems.
- ✓ Providing incentives for the girl-child such as food, transportation and school fees- The schools visited in this research recognized incentives as a motivator for the girl-

child education especially at the period when government was providing food for the students in the school, the students were staying longer in school in order to read before going home which actually prolonged their stay in the school. Thereby making the girls to attend all periods of the classes for the day. It also encouraged enrollment.

- ✓ Educating the parents through PTA meetings – through PTA meetings, the girl-child education can be introduced to parents. The need for girls to acquire functional education, necessary for engendering economic, political and social emancipation should be stressed to the parents.
- ✓ Availability of the counseling unit to all– Counselors should make guidance services, such as group and individual counseling and information services, available to all in their community. These services will focus on the benefits that are imbedded in the provision of equal rights and opportunities to all irrespective of sex, religion, age and other differences.
- ✓ Sensitization – seminars, symposia, career talks, advertisement through media and pamphlets, skills development programmes and workshop could also be organized to sensitize community members and motivate governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide the necessary assistance to help in promoting girl-child education. For instance, provision of educational opportunities to girls by these organizations.
- ✓ Teachers Incentives – the need for teachers’ welfare cannot be overemphasized as the well being of the teacher determines the performances of the teachers and students. Teachers’ salaries should be increased and incentives should be given to them to encourage good output in their career.

V. DISCUSSIONS

The four government secondary schools visited had total population of 960 staff. The researcher administered 280 questionnaires but 240 were recovered after the survey. From the data analysis boys’ enrollment did not exceed that of the girls in the North-central government secondary schools in Nigeria. It is important to note from the results stated in the analysis that girls drop-out rate in the schools is very minimal. In the case where it is high in G.S.S Nyanya, the drop-out is as a result of the girls’ poor academic performances at senior secondary school level. Due to fear of not being given a second chance from either parent or guardians, to register for West African Examinations Council (WAEC) again; these girls drop out in order to register in other interior senior secondary school to have opportunity to pass their examination at first sitting through indulgence in cheating and examination malpractices.

Taking a close look at the barriers and obstacles to girls’ enrolment in north-central government secondary school of Nigeria, poverty ranked highest with 43.7%. Poverty also ranked highest (40%) for reasons for dropping out of girls in the government secondary schools. The reasons could be as a result of unemployment, lack of sufficient education, retrenchment of workers, poor remuneration. Stringent measures or policies attached to obtaining loans in the banks

for the purpose of starting a small-scale-business may be a contributory factor to the high level of poverty in the society. This finding is in agreement with the conclusion of Alika (2010) which showed that poverty ranked highest amongst the reasons for dropout of schools. UNICEF (2004) also states that some 65 million girls are out of school for various reasons including poverty. Alika and Egbochuku (2009) found that socio-economic status of the girls imposes considerable constraints upon their continuing stay in school. In fact, they asserted that a girl’s particular socio-economic inheritance may have a direct and important effect on educational attainment

Poor academic performance ranked second (36%) among the reasons for drop-out from school. This could be as a result of inadequate learning facilities, genetic make-up of the individual and lack of motivation. Ogletree (1992) found that the main reason for first year students dropping out of school centres on dissatisfaction and frustration with academic programmes. This finding is also supported by that of Sigworth (1995) who opined that one predictive factor that accounts for high incidence of dropout was failure in examinations.

Pregnancy and early marriage was third in ranking (15%). This may be as a result of culture, peer influence, lack of sex education, and poverty. This finding is in line with the finding of Mohammed (2000) who opined that a girl may be withdrawn from school if a good marriage prospect arises. The fourth ranked reason is the distance of school from home (9%). In cases where the girl-child is living far and the parents of the girl are not buoyant financially, transportation cost or trekking distance to school becomes a reason for withdrawing the girl-child from school.

The counseling unit encounters different barriers and obstacles in assisting the girl-child education. Girls fear to express themselves ranked the highest (62%). Girls’ lack of confidence in the counselors ranked second (28%). This is because most girls are unable to demand for their rights, due to shyness or low self-esteem. The school does not have an effective counseling unit to help solve the problem of girl-child education ranked third (5%). The counseling unit do not aim at solving girl-child education ranked fourth (5%). This is failure in the part of the school counseling unit who do not recognize the problem of girl-child education or have not devised a measure or strategies for solving the problem of girl-child education.

For counseling, counselors should identify the community problem of girl-child enrollment and devise a means of sensitizing the community through workshops, seminars, training where community stakeholders, government officials and non-governmental organizations will participate, also the counselors should identify indigent students, who are likely to drop out of school as a result of poverty, and help negotiate some form of scholarship and financial assistance for them. An incentive like food provision cannot be overstressed in this study because it is observed in G.S.S Nyanya that feeding has increased the students’ attendance in school. According to Braun, Swaminathan and Rosegrant (2004) feeding in school has paid significant educational dividends. A school feeding programme in Bangladesh, for instance, has resulted in a 35% overall increase in enrolment and a remarkable increase 44%

increase for girls'. It is recommended that governments should emulate Bangladesh so as to achieve the Millennium Development Goal number two, which is attaining Universal Basic Education.

VI. CONCLUSION

Education is important for the girl-child especially now that the nation is striving to achieve higher level of development in all spheres of life. The education given to the girl child will enable her fit properly into the rapidly changing world. Education is an important tool for both social and economic transformation of a nation. The secondary education is an important level of education that determines how strong the upper level of education will be. Since the girl-child plays an important role not only in their life but in the life of others, she therefore needs an effective and efficient secondary education to participate actively in our complex society. In view of the importance of the secondary education to the girl-child in particular and the nation in general, all stake-holders in the education sector will have to do more to eliminate these factors militating against the girl-child education by: The effective and efficient educational structures so as to eliminate the factors militating against the girl child education in general, most especially poverty and low quality of education which have been recognized in this study as a militating factor. The co-operation of the government, private sectors, parents, teachers and members of the general public in the implementation of the measures stated above is therefore needed if the nation is to succeed in educating the girl child to enable them contribute their quota in national development.

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