Abstract

Globally, one of the indisputable facts is that there is gender disparity worldwide. The imbalance manifests in all facets of life and education is not an exception. The paper focused on the dilemma of education in Nigeria as it affects girl-child education in Northern Nigeria. The popular view is that education in Nigeria has lost quality, efficacy and functionality, and going by this outcry, it becomes pertinent to tackle gender disparity in education which the paper x-rayed by looking at the nature of dilemma in education in Nigeria and the girl-child education in Nigeria, the socio-economic and socio-cultural perspective that impedes girl-child education in the North. Recommendations were made through giving equal access to educational opportunities to female child and incentives that will help females complete their education at various levels be made a priority.

Education is universally seen as a veritable tool for the development of human race which means that it is an important factor in attaining social order, socio-economic justice, freedom and equal opportunity which translates to accelerated development both economically and technologically. Education is also seen as a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal declaration on human rights. The possibility of making education accessible to all and especially the female child in Africa especially in Nigeria and most especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria has remained a daunting challenge. All efforts at addressing this challenge and ensuring that education of the girl child in the Northern part of Nigeria continues to be a topical issue.
The gender disparity in education is more glaring in the northern part of Nigeria as the rate of female enrolment and retention in school poses a serious threat to the success of international instrument like the Education For All (EFA) by 2015 Goals and the Millennium Development Goals.

The dilemma faced by the education industry in Nigeria as a developing country has also contributed to the widening gap on the issue of gender equity among Nigerian children. Despite the on-going reform programme embarked upon by the federal government of Nigeria to address the issue of gender imbalance in education. This is because girls access to basic education especially in the Northern states of Nigeria has remained low. (UNICEF 2007), cited in Salman, Olawoye and Yahaya (2011). Buttressing this, the United Nations International Children Emergency Fund states that only 20% of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school while the North central and North West present the worst scenario (UNICEF 2007).

According to Blueprint (2012) on the topic: appreciating girl-child education in Nigeria, it says that like all human rights, context of girls right to education can be found in our local legislations and international commitments. Despite all this, the girl child is bearing the double jeopardy she suffers as a child and suffers additional discrimination as a girl-child. The female child especially in the Northern part of Nigeria are denied access to education and several of them are exposed to harmful traditional practices like genital mutilation, denial of education, child-trafficking etc.

Education for the girl child, just as it is for the male child, is generally considered to be one of the core rights. Meanwhile statistical monitoring of education reveals that the national literacy rate for female is only 56% as compared to 72% for male. Also, female literacy, enrolment and achievement rates are much more and unreasonably lower than those of their male counterparts. For instance in Sokoto in North Western part of the country, UNICEF African Girls Education Initiative is 25% compared to 59% for boys.

The Dilemma of Education in Nigeria and Girl-Child Education

Dilemma according to Hornby (2006), is a situation that creates problem that leads to one making a very difficult choice between things of equal importance.

The dilemma of education in Nigeria as seen by Ukaegbu (2011) explains a situation in which Nigeria as a developing nation places premium on high quality education. Education that will equip individuals with skills to serve society. Education has always been seen world wide as a veritable tool for development of human beings physically, mentally and socially, making it accessible to all is the predicament or
dilemma that Nigeria is faced with. Not only making it accessible to all but also ensuring that girl child education is properly harnessed in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Blueprint (2012) confirmed this by stating that the climate of educational backwardness in Nigeria is fast becoming an issue of major concern especially as it relates to girl child education. It continued that the girl child is bearing the double jeopardy – she suffers as a child and suffers additional discrimination as a girl child. The female child especially in the Northern part of Nigeria are denied access to education. In support of this, UNICEF (2007) in their project in Northern Nigeria further confirmed that statistics show that in Nigeria, girls’ access to basic education, especially in Northern states, has remained low. As few as 20% of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. Adamu (2012), in Nigeria observer online, stated that statistics have shown that the number of girls attending school in Northern Nigeria is abysmally low in spite of the huge investment in the sub-sector by successive state and federal administrations. He further mentioned that a research by Action Aid International in one of the Northern states shows that there are only three girls out of a total of 150 pupils enrolled in a particular school.

The world conference on Education for All, (EFA) held in Geneva in 1990 stressed the need for gender equity in Education. Also the Beijin conference of 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2005 also emphasized gender equity. In Nigeria also, the National Policy on Education (FRN: 2004) also states the need to equalize education opportunities between girls and boys. Mishra (2008), in support of the above stated that in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000, member states of United Nations made a most passionate commitment to address the crippling poverty and multiplying misery that grip many areas of the globe. That is why all governments set a date of 2015 by which they would meet the Millennium Development Goals and one of the goals is to promote gender equality and empower women. This means that investing in girls’ education today not just with money but with energy and enthusiasm, commitment and concern, focus and intensity – is a strategy that will protect the rights of all children to quality education, and a strategy that will jump – start all other developments. Providing quality education and making it accessible to all especially the girl child is one of the dilemmas faced by education in Nigeria especially in the Northern state, therefore, it becomes pertinent upon the Nigerian government to work relentlessly in ensuring that disparity in education especially in the North is properly discussed if she must meet up with the MDGs of 2015 that is just three years from now.
Benefits of Girl-Child/Female Education

Mamser (1991) cited in Okloho and Ogoh (2012), stated that in a contemporary society, it is believed that if a man is trained, an individual is trained but if a woman is trained, the whole nation is a beneficiary. Mishra (2008), stated that the benefits of educating girls are long established. But there is new understanding as to why educating girls is the most urgent task facing the global development community and how girls’ education can drive the international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Girl’s education is the most effective means of combating many of the most profound challenges of human development. Adamu (2008) in Obadiah, Modire and Hussaini (2012), stated that the importance of development of girl’s education cannot be overstated. To capitalize on the potentials of its people, and ensure healthier, more educated, empowered and productive citizens, Nigeria must invest in educating the mothers of the next generation. Girls who are educated will contribute to future economic growth of their nation.

UNICEF (2007), in GTZ Education Project in Northern Nigeria states that girls’ education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country’s development. Educated girls develop essential life skills, including; self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and sexual exploitation. Girls’ education also helps in cutting children and maternal mortality rates, contributing to national wealth and controlling diseases and health status. Children of educated women are more likely to go to school and consequently, this has exponential positive effects on education and poverty reduction for generations to come. More importantly, girls’ education is a major catalyst for achieving gender equality in any country. Educated girls graduate to literate women and no country will achieve gender equality with uneducated girls and illiterate women.

Factors That Impinge on Girl Child Education in Northern Nigeria

In Northern Nigeria, as in other parts of the country, women are considered secondary citizens and as such their education does not receive the priority as that of the boys. (Akujobi 2006).

Haroun (1973) cited in Akujobi (2006), identified problems of educating girls in the North. They include religious, social and economic factors. Among them are:

1. Traditional antagonism of Muslims towards Western Education.
2. Marriage customs and seclusion of women, Purdah (Kulle), in Hausa Muslim Society.
3. Fear of moral laxity in the schools.
4. Paucity of post-primary institutions.
5. Lukewarm support by the political leadership.
Blueprints (2012), stated that teenage marriage has also militated against girl attendance, retention and achievements in school. About 30% of school age girls drop out of school having already begun child bearing at early age. The implication of these phenomena is that many have suffered from psychological imbalances, since they are mostly not matured for managing marital home. Sicknesses and disease, such as Visco Vaginal Fistula (VVF), have also become rampant following this social problem. The Maryam Abacha Children and Women Hospital, Sokoto is a centre where young girls who are victims of VVF are presently receiving treatment.

Cultural and religious biases are yet other factors which have indeed contributed to the low level of girl child education. Many Nigerian parents in the North especially in large families with limited resources enroll boys in schools instead of girls or some daughters out of school due to misinterpretation of the tenets of Islamic religious practices.

Also Action Aid International (AAIN) discovered through a research that there was gap in favour of boys in school enrolment, retention and completion. The study on girl’s education revealed factors affecting girls as cost of education, school environment, government policies and their implementation, the culture of the people amongst others. Igbuzor (2006), confirmed that statistics indicate glaring imbalances against girls in enrolment, attendance and completion rates at all levels of education in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern parts of the country, due to a variety of socio-cultural and religious factors. Adamu (2012), in Nigeria observer online states that stakeholders have attributed the poor enrolment of girls in formal school system in Northern Nigeria to socio-economic and religious factors which, they noted, give preference to the boy-child. All these factors continue to widen the gap in school enrolment, retention and completion in favor of boys in many states in the North.

**Conclusion**

Education is central to development and improvement of the nation’s welfare and Girl-child education is also an investment in human capital which equips the individual to make positive contributions to the development of the society. Denying the girl-child access to education is depriving her, her fundamental human right and denying the nation development. Akujobi (2006), stated that from studies carried out, one finds that Islam is never against girl-child education, rather, the religion encourages the education of women even through the Prophet (PBUTH) in chapter 33:34 of the Qur’an says “And stay in your homes with dignity, and do not show off yourselves like the showing of in the former days of ignorance, and observe prayer”…. It is good to note also that the same Qur’an, Chapter 33:35 makes it very clear that believers (both male and female) have complete spiritual equality. Prophet Mohammed (PBUTH) said “seek ye knowledge even if it takes you as far as China”. Therefore factors like
religion, culture and otherwise should not be used to deny girls access to education if effective development must occur. According to sociologists, no country can attain its fullest potential in human capital development without harnessing the potential of its female population through adequate access to qualitative education for the girl child. Yari (2012) in the Nigerian News 24 online maintains that it is important for girls to attend school for us to meet the Millennium Development Goals. We should not discourage girls from going to school due to traditional and religious reasons.

**Recommendations**

According to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, University of Lagos has offered the following suggestions:

1. The primary instrument to achieve socio-economic empowerment that is education mainstreaming should be used in a more effective and practical way so as to make real progress toward the attainment of the MDG’s education for all’s goal by 2015 realizable.
2. The Secondary instrument that is, specific, targeted actions such as abolition of school fees, free school uniforms, free feeding etc. should be utilized as a compliment of mainstreaming strategies.
3. Imperialist male-gender privilege and biased traditional and religious myths impeding women’s education should be de-emphasized in Nigerian society.
4. An empowering educational approach, incorporating women as invaluable partners for social development should be encouraged.
5. Skills, capabilities and achievements should henceforth take pre-eminence over obnoxious gender stereotypes in classifying and rewarding people in Nigeria.

Other ways include public enlightenment/awareness which will be channeled towards increased awareness and knowledge on the benefits of girl child education. In doing this, the awareness should be central on the issue of male preference for enrolment by parents, using girl child for hawking and withdrawal of girl child from school for marriage.

1. The government, stake holders and communities should ensure that school environment, infrastructures and management create a conducive atmosphere that will encourage retention and completion of girl child education.
2. Guidance and counseling centres at all levels of education in Nigeria should be properly funded to facilitate all round functional guidance and counseling services in the schools that will assist the female child to stay and complete her education.
3. Finally, Blueprints (2012), enjoins Northern Leaders and state governments to ensure that they make laws and policies that will prevent parents from sending
their children off to the matrimonial institution, until they achieve basic education. Anything short of this is a bad tale.

References


