

# **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF THE GIRL-CHILD AS A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO SELF-RELIANCE**

**PROFESSOR MARGARET AKPOMI**

*Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education  
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

**DR. IBITOROKO BEN-GEORGE**

*Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education  
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

**And**

**DR. BOMA ISABELLA DAMBO**

*Department of Business Education, Faculty of Education  
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt*

## **Abstract**

*For as many years as one can recall, the issue of educating the girl-child has been on-going and has not nearly reached an end at this time, especially in regions referred to as Sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is part. In many parts of the country girls and women, education stakeholders, organisations are still grappling with the issues associated with the yawning problem of the girl-child education. This article seeks to reiterate the all-importance of educating the girl-child as has been repeatedly done by notable researchers and research organisations, highlight the rationality of entrepreneurship and vocational education as means of breaking the identified barriers to girl-child education, uncover some of the many benefits that could be derived from this attempt at the immediate and national levels, as wells as make recommendations that could lead to achieving this goal.*

**Keywords:** Girl-Child, Inclusive Education, Girl-Child Education, Self-Reliance.

## **Introduction**

Education of the citizenry of a nation has been said to be a vehicle for national and global development. Every nation has its set of policies put in place to see the achievement of this objective. Nigeria for example had marked the year 2015 to see the attainment of free and compulsory nine years of basic education for every child but as we know it, the issue of policy implementation in Nigeria is a matter which not many people are ready to discuss. More so, the issue of educating the girl-child at different levels has been an all-time

catchphrase in many developing countries including Nigeria. The sheer infinitude of this subject matter emphasizes the importance of educating the girl child and brings to bare the wantonness in means for the girl child education, opportunities and education policy execution.

Rightly put by Alabi, Bahah and Alabi (2016), today's girl-child is tomorrow's woman. This is why governments, education policy makers and stakeholders must consciously see to the achievement of the education and wellbeing of the girl-child to create an enabling environment for the tomorrow's woman of society. The National Population Commission (2013) of Nigeria reported that the sex ratio of men and women in Nigeria was 102men:100women. This report depicts that women and girls represent 49.5 percent of the total population in Nigeria, and the men 50.5 percent. This means that women represent nearly a half of the nation's population. Any nation who chooses to educate only one half of its populace has deprived itself of exploring gainful resources and will only succeed in creating a divide in its economic attainable goals.

It is agreeable as Revi (2011) put it, that boys and girls around the world do not enjoy perfectly equal access to education and training opportunities, despite regular awareness campaigns for the girl-child education. This gaping problem of unequal access is what Ganiyu and Adeniyi (2022) described as a wicked problem in the educational sector. Women in Global Science and Technology (WISAT) (2012) concurred that women are the greatest sufferers of deprivation, social isolation, lack of financial and productive resources, although, according to Oti (2013) and Akpochafo (2020), they do 75 percent of the world's work and earn only  $\frac{1}{10}$  of the world's salaries.

Although 49 percent of countries around the world are said to have attained parity in boys and girls enrollment at primary education level (UNICEF, 2018), this cannot be said in some developing countries in the sub-Sahara region which includes Nigeria. More so, priority should be on the completion of girls' education at all levels. According to The World Bank (2022), Girl child education stretches past enrollment into schools, but also borders on ensuring that girls feel safe while learning at school, have the opportunity to complete all levels of education, acquire the knowledge and skills to compete in the labor market, gain socio-emotional and life skills necessary to adapt to a changing world; make their own decisions, contribute to their communities and the world at large.

### **Preparing the Girl-Child for diversified Entrepreneurship/Vocational Education for Global Development**

A girl-child needs both informal and qualitative formal educations to grow into a proper and useful adult. These will empower her to develop her mind, intellects and skills to be capable of contributing meaningfully to society (Alabi, Bahah & Alabi, 2016). United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) (2022) speculates that when nations become gender-responsive, then quality education will be accessible to all. This type of responsiveness has the potential to develop societies and build sustainable peace. A Chinese proverb found in Jibrin (2019) expressed that education is the best legacy to give a child because giving your child a skill is better than giving him or her a thousand pieces of gold. This goes to say that the thought about women only having a place in the kitchen is absolutely cliché and is being replaced by the awareness that education is a fundamental

human right and should not be denied anyone irrespective of age, sex, religion, class or nationality.

To Oxfam (2018), one way to achieving girl child education is through Value Education which aims at developing positive attitudes in individuals: not only to help the individual find their own values but also to develop critical thinking abilities to deal with conflicts, understand their actions and consequences, develop healthy relationships, and become dependable members of the society. In this context, Value Education may be seen as encompassing all forms of education: formal, informal, non-formal or vocational. According to ILO and UNICEF (2018), changing gender norms that limit girls' aspirations and ability to work and investing in quality education of girls to acquire critical skills for employability have the potential to develop a skilled Girl Force, as quality education prepares girls not only with foundational skills, such as literacy and numeracy, but also with transferable skills such as self-confidence, communication, decision-making, as well as technical and vocational skills which are critical for female youth to engage in decent work, become entrepreneurs, and access further training and learning.

ILO and UNICEF (2018) iterated that the task of developing a skilled GirlForce requires global effort to attract attention and investment to equipping girls with knowledge and skills needed for work and to successfully transition into employment. ILO and UNICEF described this task as a movement to enable girls gain confidence, overcome the barriers preventing their full participation in the workforce, find employment, build careers, start businesses and become economically empowered individuals. To achieve this, the global community was encouraged to do the following 8 recommendations:

1. Deliver large-scale public and private sector programming for girls' education, skills and market-adapted training.
2. Improve the quality and relevance of teaching and learning to enable girls to develop the foundational, transferable and technical/vocational skills needed for life and work.
3. Challenge gender stereotypes, social norms and change unconscious bias in relation to gender roles to enable girls to have the same learning and career opportunities as boys.
4. Provide the poorest girls, single and young mothers, with financial incentives to stay in school or to participate in youth employment or skills development programs.
5. Empower, motivate, encourage and create the space for girls and young women to consider careers in the growing digital world of work.
6. Increase girls' participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) learning.
7. Create initiatives to support girls' school-to-work transition, such as career guidance, apprenticeships, and work experience programmes.
8. Enable access to training, finance and enterprise development for female entrepreneurs.

On their own part, Kelley, Singer and Herrington (2012) envisioned entrepreneurship as the antidote to gender limitations for economic advantage and established that adopting entrepreneurship as a culture is a function of socialization which implies that it can be constructed, taught and learnt, while Shankyura and Naddo (2010) recommended vocational education as having a high potential of provide career opportunities for the Nigerian youth especially girls, adding that girls can contribute in no small measure, to reducing the pressures industries in Nigeria. Supporting these insights are Dambo (2020a), Ben-George

and Ubong(2020), pointing to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for women poverty alleviation, financial freedom and economic contribution, noting that most women and girls in Nigeria are already taking the business of their livelihoods in their own hands, leveraging on ICTs to develop skills and know-hows, creating for themselves new niches and contributing to their own empowerment through videos, podcasts, online/distant learning opportunities using social media applications such as YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook. Instagram and other internet based applications through which they learn skills such as crocheting, bead-making, crafting, cooking, blogging, advertising, and social content creation. According to Dambo, ICTs offer flexibility of time and space, away out of isolation and a potentially increased access to knowledge and productive resources even in remote locations, while stimulating economic growth and development.

Not contrary to the foregoing, Buhari, Mukhtar, & Oyeyiola (2020) argued that Nigerian women have the potentials to transform an impoverished nation to a vibrant economy through adequate empowerment and are crucial, beyond certain customary duties and procreation efforts. Therefore, entrepreneurship education for women and girls will be incomplete if formal learning institutions are not complemented withinformal/vocational institutions to cultivate entrepreneurship culture which is useful for wealth creation across all genders. Dambo (2020b) added that much investment in infrastructure beneficial to women and for providing all types of education for the girl-child at all levels is needed to banish the prevailing gender disparities to encourage and support girls and women to achieve full potentials for self-reliance and attain sustainable development.

### **Benefits of Educating the Girl-Child**

Educating the girl-child for entrepreneurship and vocational involvement for self-reliance is of major benefit to society, however, there is a pool of other benefits that society and the girl-child could achieve if conscious and consistent measures are put in place to educate the girl-child. As the popular saying goes, “if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you education a nation”. Anyebe (2015) attributed prevalent poverty among women and girls in Nigeria to the inappropriateness of education and training, a disabling sociocultural environment which denies women a good number of basic human rights: inadequate access to credits, low social value placed on the girl-child and human welfare roles played by women in society and the generally low status of women in society, aside well-known political and economic causes, stating that schools are often characterized by old-fashioned operations and management structures mostly incapable of producing female entrepreneurs with the capacity to develop ideas and to turn ideas to profitably satisfying ventures. Anyebe however added that the paradigm shift from the develop mentalist to the entrepreneurial function of education has changed the traditional impression of education as the engine-house of the state enterprise. Also, the idea of keeping women in no-income and low-income occupations is changing in the face of a growing market-oriented, competitive and private sector driven economy. Jibrin (2019) more so concluded that educating the girl-child translates to better health for the future generations, reduced child mobility and mortality, preparedness to face realities in society and breaking the shell of ignorance, leading to self-discovery and thus activating a snowball effect of achieving all other sustainable development goals in a practicable manner. Buhari, Mukhtar and Oyeyiola (2020) agreed with the idea that training and educating the girl-child for self-

reliance and national sustainable development is not only a goal in itself, but is fundamental to the realization of other goals.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the theoretical foundation in this article, it is honest to say that efforts at achieving girl-child education in Nigeria is still moving at snail speed. This is drawn from the fact that recent researches on the subject continually bother on the same issues that researches of ages long have iterated. I presume that the recommendations of such articles have not reached the stakeholders in this context or such recommendations have been completely ignored. It is however worthy of emphasis that entrepreneurship and vocational education are sure instruments for providing the education, training and refinement of attitudes that girls need to develop confidence in the dignity of labour in decent work, which is highly satisfying and rewarding.

### **Recommendations**

In addition to the Recommendations of ILO and UNICEF (2018) above, which I would like to adopt, I recommend the following:

1. Radical enlightenment campaigns and advocacies should be promoted throughout all sectors of society to provide re-orientation for parents, care-givers and communities to cause an attitudinal change regarding the subject of girl-child education and the need for the girl-child to gainfully contribute to her wellbeing and national economy.
2. The government is encouraged to allocate adequate, non-political support funds for entrepreneurship and vocational education of girls to train in choice vocations and to participate in entrepreneurial activities to gain self-reliance as well as contribute to sustainable economic growth and development.
3. As it is said that today's girl is tomorrow's woman, there is need for policy agencies, NGOs and arms of society headed by women to carry out regular and radical sensitization of Women in society as deliberate efforts to help other women and girls attain full potentials through provision of entrepreneurial and vocational education/skills training programmes.
4. Governments at all levels are encouraged to provide incentives such as bursaries and scholarships in entrepreneurship and vocational education programmes to encourage girls to take part in such lifelong education opportunities.

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