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Education For All: Implications for Boy-Child Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is the key and in this era no one can do without it irrespective of one's biological affiliation. The federal government launched boy-child education to tackle the high rate of male dropout from schools in the southeast and other parts of the country. This programme is aimed at ensuring the enrolment of about 9.5 million pupils in schools by 2020. It is estimated that about 10 million Nigerian children of primary school age are out of school because of some challenges. These include: lack of political commitment, poor planning and management as well as blind curriculum. Other palpable reasons are child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, bereavement, truancy, broken homes, engagement of children as house helps, all these are the clog in the wheel of boy-child education in Nigeria. Sequel to this, Nigeria embarked on Universal Basic Education in a bid to meet the millennium development goal of education for all 2015- target, including the boy-child education. Hence, this paper focuses on education for all and its implications for boy-child education in Nigeria. It was concluded that boy-child education should be encouraged at all levels of Nigerian educational system. The paper recommended that the government should promulgate laws making boy-child education compulsory in Nigeria.

Keywords: Education, education for all, boy-child education, millennium development goals

All Nigerian children who should be in school are not in school. In the southeast (especially Igbo-speaking) parts, one prevalent problem is the boy-child drop-out syndrome (Oluwatobi, 2006). The boys, for economic reasons, refuse to go to school, and those who enter primary schools dropout prematurely. They refuse to complete primary and secondary education because of the economic problems encountered by the educated in society. Many boys are found in mechanic villages as apprentices to crafts masters, in various types of businesses, or in other engagement outside the school (Oluwatobi, 2006). In the Northern parts of the country, the problem is that of girl-child dropout from school, for reasons ranging from early marriage to cultural values opposed to female education as well as ignorance. Thus there are more boys than girls in schools in that part of the country.

Combined efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Federal Ministry of Education and State Agencies for Mass Education have been directed at providing Non-formal Education Curriculum and the associated reading materials development for the out-of-school learners. The Universal Basic Education programme, launched by the Obasanjo administration will, it is hoped, help solve the problem of access to formal education for many school-age children especially the boy-child (Oluwatobi, 2006).

Concept of Education

Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, politically and economically (Ufforma, 2009). That is why at graduation ceremonies, one hears the Vice-Chancellors pronounce these words while awarding degrees to their institutions' graduates, "you have been found worthy in character and learning", in education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, knows as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviours are the focus of training individuals in institutions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education. The programme is organized, planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental (Offorma, 2009).

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes his or her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to himself or 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.

Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1949 stipulated that:

i. Everyone has the right to education. This shall be free at least in the elementary and primary stages.
ii. Elementary education shall be compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available.
iii. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
iv. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children (Nwangwu, 1976).

To this end, the first aim of every family and society should be to raise healthy and productive individuals who are physically, psychologically, socially, and mentally well developed. These can be achieved through the education of the boy-child who is the future leader of tomorrow.

Education For All

Education for all is a relatively new ambition for human societies. It was not until the 18^{th} and 19^{th} centuries that countries began to take seriously the idea of educating the whole population. This idea did not feature in the international agenda until the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated in 1948. At article 26, that declaration included the statement:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. There is another proviso in that article that is often forgotten by government:
3. (3) Parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Why is education for all important? Various arguments have been used. In his classic, 'the wealth of a nation', Adam Smith wrote: The more (ordinary people) are instructed the less liable they are to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstitions, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasioned the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the

measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable government which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it. To this end, Adam Smith strongly supported public investment in education: 'For very small expenses, the public can facilitate, can encourage and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education' (Smith, 1776). For Adam Smith, educating everyone was important to underpin peace, order and good government.

The Boy-Child

The boy-child is a biological male offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0 – 5years), primary (6 – 12years) and secondary school (12 – 18years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be his parents or guardians and other siblings. It is made of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the boy-child is malleable, builds and develops his personality and character. He is very dependent on the significant others, those on who he models his behavior, through observation, repetition and imitation. His physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Offorma, 2008).

Boy-Child Education in Nigeria

The education of the boy-child before now has never dominated public discourse, because males have always been viewed as more educationally advantageous than their female counterparts (Isibor, 2012). The national campaign on back-to-school for the boy-child in the South East – recently launched by the Federal Government in Enugu State – may not have come at a better time than now. There are several men from the South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria who never had access to formal education. Investigation shows that many adolescent males in the region prefer to take up a vocation in trading than continue in formal education, which has created a huge gap in boy-child education in the region (Isibor, 2012). It is in view of the above that the Federal Government launched the back-to-school programme to address the challenge of boy-child education in the zone. At the inauguration of the back to school campaign in Enugu on June 19, 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan directed the ministry of education to construct additional schools in the South-East to address the challenge of boy-child education. Jonathan also directed that such schools should be constructed within one year to address the gap in the boy-child education in the zone. He said that closing the gap would also improve the potentials of individuals and make them effective in decentralized global economy.

The President, represented by the Minister of Education, Prof. Ruqayyatu Rufai, reiterated the Federal Government's effort towards providing adequate infrastructure to improve the education of the boy-child in the South East. According to the president, the participation of youths in formal education would boost small and medium scale enterprises and enhance economic activities in the country. The back-to-school programme could be seen as a replica of the Almajari Education system also launched by the Federal Government, but in the northern part of the country, which is expected to take children off the streets. There are estimated 9.5 million indigent children on the streets begging for arms in the northern part of the country (Isibor, 2012).

Boy-Child Drop-Out in School

The federal government launched boy-child education to tackle the high rate of male dropouts from schools in the southeast. With the launch of boy-child education for the southeast, the federal government seems to have kept faith with its promise to ensure the education of Nigerian citizens (Uzondu, 2012). On May 31st this year, President GoodLuck Jonathan launched the almajiri model education system in Sokoto State, which is meant at integrating Quranic with Western education. In June 2010, the Vice President, Architect Namadi Sambo flagged off the campaign targeted at girl-child education in Yola, Adamawa State. The boy-child education which was launched at Micheal Okpara Square in Enugu State, was aimed at arresting male dropouts, which is mostly experienced in the southeast (Uzondu, 2012). President Jonathan whose address at the occasion was read by the minister of education, Professor Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufai, said that even though the people of the southeast zone have a passion for enterprise education will contribute in boosting the potentials of the individuals so as to become more effective in the current digitalized global environment. ‘’Although the southeast is blessed with natural resources, all these will remain hugely untapped if the skilled human resources are not readily available to drive the process .It is therefore for this reason that all hands must be on deck to support government's effort in ensuring that boys from the region are fully engaged in schools.’’ The approach to solving the problem, he suggested will be for each state to work in tandem with the local government councils in the states, traditional rulers in the various communities and the town unions in identifying the unique challenges of the boy-child education in their respective areas.

The administration has developed a four-year strategic plan of the development of the education sector in the country. Among the strategies is the 'access and equity' campaign, which is identified as one of the major steps of letting millions of Nigerian children that are currently out of school to redress their steps (Uzondu, 2012). Professor Rufai noted that the government is aware that each region has its own social and cultural challenges militating against early child education, and therefore is

tackling them head-on in line with its transformation. The Enugu state governor, Sullivan Chime, restated the commitment of his administration in projecting education as the biggest industry in the state. Governor Rochas Okorocha of Imo State and his Ebonyi State counterpart, Chief Martin Elechi promised to continue to promote boy-child education in their states. Enugu state commissioner for education, Dr. Simon Ortuanya, stated that the education policy of the state is to encourage the boy-child to obtain basic education up to junior secondary before veering off for trade for those who do not want to further their education. The state government has made education free and compulsory from primary school up to junior secondary (Uzondu, 2012).

It is estimated that about 10 million Nigerian children of primary school age are out of school because of some challenges. These include: lack of political commitment, poor planning and management as well as blind curriculum. Foremost Nigerian Nationalist, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in his book, "Silent Resistance: High School dropouts Among Igbo-Nigerian children," recommended that "curriculum should be relevant to global needs such as the inclusion of more science and technology in the basic curriculum, but not at the expense of a holistic view of the needs of the society in question. Schooling is designed to produce literacy in all fields of life, but especially literacy in one's culture".

There has been a decrease in male dropouts in the southeast in the last four years. Statistics has shown that the southeast has the highest number of students admitted into higher institutions in the country between 2002 and 2007. Records culled from the University Examination Matriculation (UME), showed that the southeast led in the number of students admitted within this period followed by south-south and then southwest (Uzondu, 2012). The north has been historically lagging behind in education since amalgamation in 1914. Also the figure of males from the zone surpassed their counterparts from other zones. The federal government's programme is aimed at ensuring the enrolment of about 9.5 million pupils in school by 2020, irrespective of their gender.

Boy-Child Enrolment in School

The Minister of State for Education, Barr. Ezenwo Nyesom Wike urged mothers in Oyo State to show commitment towards redressing the dwindling enrolment of boys in schools within the state. Wike spoke in Ibadan while addressing the women at a capacity building workshop for Mothers' Association organized by the Federal Ministry of Education in conjuction with the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) office. The minister's advice showed declining school enrolment among boys in Oyo, Abia, Anambra, Imo and Ebonyi States. Represented by the Deputy Director Gender Education in the Ministry, Mrs. Adeola Fola Ola, Wike restated the government's commitment to gender equality by ensuring equal access of quality education to all.

"The Federal Ministry of Education has made access to quality education its cardinal policy to enhance and develop citizens with the skills and competences to function in diverse sectors of the economy". Lamenting the high percentage of school drop-outs in the country, the minister decried the practice of luring young school children into apprentice and business urging a reverse of the situation if the country must attain its literacy goals before 2015.

The minister, advocated for supports from mothers in maintaining that gender education is mainstreamed to achieve high level of retention and quality education in schools within the country. "I invite you mothers to join us in creating the environment favourable to education of our boys and girls and ensure sustainability of our activities". A statement from the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), read at the workshop disclosed that the office adopted intervention in education sector as a framework for responding to the challenges of access to quality education, because it recognizes education as the key to the rapid development of any society. The statement reminded stakeholders of the 2015 deadline set to meet the education for all goals adding that much work still needs to be done to accelerate progress towards the attainment of EFA and MDGs. A facilitator at the programme, Mrs. Rosemary Effiong blamed the problem of school drop-out on mistaken orientation, peer pressure and unemployment, urging parents to wither all temptations advanced by economic factors and give their boy-child a benefiting future through education.

Conclusion

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes his or her potentialities and uses them for self actualization, to be useful to himself or herself and others. There have been remarkable advances in the nation's educational system at all levels, although several problems have continued to plague the educational system especially that of boy-child education. However, with the launching of boy-child education in southeast and almajiri model education in the Northern states, and the successful implementation of Universal Basic Education (UBE), Education for All (EFA) especially, boy-child education shall become a reality in Nigeria.

Recommendations

To promote boy-child education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The politicians and other members of the public should leave politics out of the education sector and work together towards supporting all the learning institutions to enhance boy-child education.

2. The government should propagate laws making boy-child education compulsory in Nigeria.
3. Entrepreneurship education should be introduced into Nigerian educational curriculum to elicit boy-child enrolment to acquire professional skills for future self-dependence.

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