

## GIRL CHILD EDUCATION: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

**ADEYEMO Titilola Rachel**  
*Department of Social Studies*  
*Federal College of Education, Oyo*  
*Adeyemotitilola67(a)gmail.com*

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### Abstract

*The education of girls in Nigeria has encountered significant challenges due to entrenched patriarchal norms, resulting in the marginalization of girls in accessing formal education. This paper examined girl child education as a veritable tool for national development in Nigeria. This paper adopted a discursive method. The importance of girl-child education in driving national development cannot be overstated. Investing in the education of girls yields significant economic, social, and sustainable benefits for nations. Educated girls become active contributors to the workforce, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. Moreover, girl-child education plays a crucial role in poverty reduction, as educated girls are empowered to break the cycle of poverty and create a better future for themselves and their communities. However, girl-child education is bedevilled with several problems ranging from traditional and cultural patterns, the presence of the colonialists, religious beliefs, poverty and parental ignorance, cost of education, sexual violence and abuse amongst others as factors in Nigeria. The denial of full educational rights to girls has far-reaching consequences for society as a whole. The future of any society becomes uncertain when girls are deprived of their right to education. Therefore, this study recommends that government should take proactive measures to enhance girl-child education by substantially subsidizing tuition fees, particularly in public schools. Both governmental and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to raise awareness among parents, especially those with limited education, about the dangers and repercussions of inadequate education for girls in local communities and society as a whole.*

**Keywords:** *Girl child education, Veritable tool, Development, Sensitization, Intensify*

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### 1 Introduction

Education should be recognized not as a privileged to few, but as a fundamental human right accessible to all individuals, irrespective of their gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, political beliefs, economic status, nationality, geographical location, or health conditions. It is through education that people gain knowledge about

their surroundings, understand the factors that contribute to human differences in various contexts, and work towards sustainable development within a country (Eze & Eze, 2018). Okafor (2016) defines education as a process of cultural assimilation that enables individuals to realize their full potential. Additionally, Eze and Eze (2018) describe education as a

means of transmitting a society's culture, norms, values, and ethics to younger generations.

Girl child education encompasses the educational development of girls and women from all social backgrounds, regardless of caste, race, or ethnicity. It encompasses education at all levels, including schools, colleges, health education, as well as professional, technical, and vocational education (Muhammed, 2014). Over the past few decades, the vital role of girl child education in driving national development has gained widespread recognition. It is universally acknowledged that empowering girls through education has the potential to bring about positive transformations in various aspects of society (Mohammed, 2014). This paper aims to highlight the critical significance of girl-child education in fostering national development. By examining the benefits of educating girls, addressing the obstacles they face, and showcasing successful initiatives, this paper underscores the pressing need to prioritize and invest in girls' education worldwide (Mohammed, 2014).

Numerous studies have shown a strong correlation between girls' education and economic progress (Bellamy, 2003; Atama, 2012). The World Bank estimates that increasing female education results in higher economic productivity and GDP growth. For instance, a study by the Council on Foreign Relations in Atama (2013) found that closing the gender gap in education could increase a country's GDP by up to 1.2% per year. Education empowers girls, enabling them to make autonomous decisions and positively influence their families. It serves as a lifeline, improving the lives of girls and women, granting them greater control over their own destinies, and equipping them with skills to contribute to sustainable development within their societies. Educated women have already

made significant contributions as Presidents, Prime ministers, Chancellors, Competitive political leaders, Ministers, Community elders, Consultants, Researchers, Managers, and in various other roles across different countries. The presence of influential women in international positions is undeniable. As leaders and managers, they have demonstrated their competence, trustworthiness, and have made invaluable contributions to enhancing productivity and fostering sustainable development in their respective nations (Assefaw, 2010).

In Nigeria, a staggering number of approximately 9 million children (37% of out-of-school children) are seen roaming the streets daily. Year after year, Nigeria continues to face a high rate of out-of-school children, with girls being the highest proportion, accounting for approximately 5.5 million out-of-school girls (Tyokaa et al, 2014). The state of girl child education in Nigeria is distressing and demands immediate attention. Consequently, this study aims to explore the significance of girl-child education as a crucial tool for national development in Nigeria.

## **2 Concept of Girl-Child Education**

In the Nigerian context, various scholars have provided different definitions of the term "girl-child." According to the National Child Welfare Policy in Assefaw (2010) submitted that the girl-child refers to individuals below 14 years of age. consider the girl-child as a female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age, encompassing the period before reaching young adulthood. This period encompasses stages such as crèche, nursery or early childhood (0–5 years), primary school (6–12 years), and secondary school (12–18 years). Throughout this developmental phase, the young child is under the care of adults, typically parents, guardians, and older siblings. It encompasses infancy,

childhood, early and late adolescence, during which the girl-child is impressionable, building and shaping her personality and character. She relies heavily on significant individuals who serve as role models, shaping her behaviour through observation, repetition, and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual, and emotional development begins during this period, reaching its peak in young adulthood (Tyoakaa, Ifeanyichukwu & Apine, 2014). According to UNICEF (2003), education is a fundamental human right for everyone. This means that no girl, regardless of her family's economic status or the country she lives in, should be deprived of schooling. Educating girls is an investment that yields significant societal development. The short and long-term benefits of education for girls and society as a whole include:

- i. Girls who receive an education develop crucial life skills such as self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and the capacity to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS infection, sexual exploitation, early marriage, and early childbirth.
- ii. Educated girls acquire skills and competencies that make them valuable contributors to the economy, enabling them to become economically productive members of society.
- iii. Educated mothers are more likely to prioritize education, leading to increased school enrollment and fostering a culture of lifelong learning.
- iv. Educated women tend to marry later and have fewer children, which allows them to provide quality education and healthcare for their children.

v. Educated mothers are better equipped to nourish and care for their children, resulting in improved child health and reduced child mortality rates.

vi. Educated women face a lower risk of maternal mortality during childbirth.

### 3 Concept of National Development

National development refers to the sustained progress and improvement of a nation's economic, social, political, and environmental conditions, aimed at enhancing the well-being and quality of life for its citizens (World Bank, 2021). It encompasses a broad range of factors, including economic growth, poverty reduction, infrastructure development, education, healthcare, governance, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

According to the UNDP (2005), national development refers to "the process of improving the well-being of the citizens of a country by creating an environment that allows people to realize their full potential, enjoy a higher standard of living, and contribute to the development of their society". This definition emphasizes the importance of human development and the empowerment of individuals within the broader context of societal progress.

### 4 Education and National Development

The significance of education in national development cannot be overstated, as it plays a pivotal role in determining a country's progress. Education is widely recognized as a prerequisite for development at all levels (Oyibenu, 2010). It is the right of every citizen, regardless of their gender, abilities, or age, rather than a privilege (Akinpelu, 2007; Oyibenu, 2010; Muhammed, 2014). The level of education among citizens serves as a crucial indicator

of a country's developmental status, encompassing political, economic, sociological, and cultural aspects (Akinpelu, 2007; Oyibenu, 2010; Muhammed, 2014).

To fully grasp the concepts of education and development, it is important to acknowledge that they are subject to various definitions, without a one-size-fits-all approach. For instance, education has been defined as the process of providing information to an inexperienced individual, facilitating their physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, political, and economic development (Akinpelu, 2007). According to Uwadia (2010), education is a process through which an individual acquires both the physical and social capabilities necessary for societal progress. It is likened to the relationship between the mind and body, where a diseased mind hinders the coordination and direction of bodily activities. Therefore, education is an essential component and a subset of any state's advancement. Similarly, Chidebulu (2010) suggests that education encompasses the cognitive, affective, and psychomotivational development of an individual, aiming to mould them for active participation in realizing development. This definition reinforces the idea that education not only brings personal growth but also positively impacts society as a whole.

## 5 Hindrances to Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Despite the Nigerian government's efforts to promote education through various programs such as Universal Primary Education (UPE), National Mass Literacy Campaign (NMLC), and Universal Basic Education (UBE), girl-child education in Nigeria continues to face numerous obstacles. Several scholars (Alabi, Bahah and Alabi (2014); Abbagana (2013); Adedokun, Ekundayo and Gbenro (2010) have identified the following hindrances to girl-child education:

### **Traditional and Cultural Patterns:**

Traditional and cultural norms in Nigeria have proven to be detrimental to the advancement of the girl-child. These norms often prioritize and dictate the girl-child's primary role as a homemaker and mother. In other words, the traditional expectations placed on the girl-child, as she transitions into womanhood, involve assuming multiple family responsibilities such as bearing and caring for children, providing for the family, managing the household, and safeguarding family health. These expectations have been perpetuated by the prevailing patriarchal system in Nigeria. It is crucial to recognize that the patriarchal value system favours gender-segregated roles, and so-called "traditional cultural values" hinder the development and progress of the girl-child, which could otherwise be achieved through education (Yartey, 2012). The author further asserts that patriarchy is characterized by male kinship, lifelong marriage, and paternal authority.

**The Impact of Colonial Rule:** During the colonial era, the educational system in Nigeria was greatly affected, particularly for girls. Initially, education was primarily focused on boys, as the colonial administration aimed to groom them for leadership and governance roles, neglecting the education of girls (Yartey, 2012). Although this changed later on, allowing girls to access education, a significant gender gap had already emerged. The education provided to girls was often limited in scope and differed from the curriculum designed for boys.

**Religious Beliefs:** Religious values, norms, ideologies, and doctrines have posed additional challenges to the education of the girl-child. Many religious societies, including Nigeria, are predominantly patriarchal, with prominent figures and

founders being mainly men (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013). In some cases, religious beliefs continue to hinder the education of girls, such as in certain interpretations of Islamic teachings where education is considered to contradict traditional Islamic values for girls. However, it is important to note that in Christian society, the Bible portrays women as significant contributors to the ministry of Christ, as evident in the incidents of his resurrection and post-ascension period.

**Poverty and Parental Ignorance:** Poverty is a pervasive issue in Nigeria and has deeply affected the mindset of its citizens. Research shows that when parents have to choose between educating a boy-child or a girl-child, they often prioritize the boy due to societal beliefs that investing in boys will yield higher returns (Oniye, 2008). The girl-child is often viewed as primarily responsible for domestic duties, leading to their withdrawal from school and engagement in activities that perpetuate their subordination to boys.

**Cost of Education:** Despite the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program initiated to eradicate illiteracy, poverty, and ignorance, the actual cost of education remains a significant obstacle for many families (Babalola, 2010). While official school fees may have been abolished, additional expenses such as enrolment fees, examination fees, uniforms, books, transportation, and stationery continue to pose financial burdens on families, making sending a child to school a substantial investment. These hindrances, rooted in historical, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors, continue to impede the education of the girl-child in Nigeria, necessitating concerted efforts to address and overcome these challenges.

Rewrite this:

**Sexual Violence and Abuse:** Due to the fear of sexual violence and abuse, most parents find it difficult to send the girl-child to school. There is the notion that she is being exposed to sexual harassment and abuse in the pursuit of education. A study provided by the National Demographic Health Survey in 2008 reveals that, 36.5 per cent of women who had acquired secondary education experience physical violence since age fifteen as compared to 15 per cent of women who were never educated (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013).

**Sexual Violence and Abuse:** The fear of sexual violence and abuse poses significant barriers to sending girls to school. Many parents are hesitant to educate their girl-child due to concerns about her safety and vulnerability to harassment and abuse. There is a perception that pursuing education exposes girls to a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence. The National Demographic Health Survey conducted in 2008 provides evidence supporting this notion, indicating that 36.5 per cent of women who have attained secondary education have experienced physical violence since the age of fifteen, compared to 15 per cent of women who have not received any formal education (Igbelina-Igbokwe, 2013).

## 6 **Girl Child Education as Panacea for National Development in Nigeria**

Girl-child education plays a vital role in national development, encompassing economic growth, social progress, and sustainable development. By investing in the education of girls, nations can unleash their potential, foster gender equality, and create a more inclusive and prosperous society. Ibrahim (2012) identified the impact of girl-child education on national



development such as economic empowerment, social well-being, and sustainable development goals.

**Economic Empowerment:** Educated girls are more likely to join the formal workforce, contributing to economic growth and productivity. The World Bank estimates that closing the gender gap in labour force participation rates could increase GDP per capita by 5% in a single generation. Girls' education has a direct correlation with poverty reduction. According to Ibrahim (2012) if all girls completed secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the poverty rate could drop by more than half-educated girls are more likely to become successful entrepreneurs, fostering innovation, and driving economic development. Empowering girls with entrepreneurial skills and access to resources can create a conducive environment for economic growth.

**Social Well-being:** Educated girls have better health outcomes for themselves and their families. They are more likely to seek healthcare services, practice healthy behaviours, and make informed decisions regarding family planning and maternal health. Education empowers girls to challenge gender norms and discrimination, reducing their vulnerability to gender-based violence (Ibrahim, 2012). Educated girls are more aware of their rights and have the knowledge and skills to protect themselves. Educated girls are more likely to engage in civic activities, participate in decision-making processes, and advocate for social change. Their voices and perspectives contribute to more inclusive and democratic societies.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Girl-child education is pivotal for achieving gender equality. It addresses gender disparities in education, promotes equal

opportunities, and challenges societal norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. Educating girls is essential for achieving the goal of quality education for all. It requires removing barriers to girls' education, ensuring inclusive and equitable learning environments, and investing in teacher training and curriculum development (Ibrahim, 2012). Girl-child education contributes to reducing inequalities within societies. It addresses the gender gap in education, promotes social inclusion, and fosters equitable opportunities for all, regardless of gender.

Investing in girl-child education is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for national development. It empowers girls, promotes gender equality, and addresses key development challenges. By prioritizing and investing in the education of girls, nations can unlock their potential, foster inclusive and sustainable development, and create a brighter future for all.

## 7 Conclusion

Based on the findings, girl-child education is bedevilled with several problems ranging from traditional and cultural patterns, the presence of the colonialists, religious beliefs, poverty and parental ignorance, cost of education, sexual violence and abuse amongst others as factors militating against the girl-child education in Nigeria. The denial of full educational rights to girl-children has far-reaching implications for society as a whole. When girls are deprived of their right to education, it creates uncertainty about the future of any society. The development and progress of society become compromised when girl-children are denied access to education, impacting the overall well-being and potential of the community. However, the importance of girl-child education in driving national development cannot be overstated. Investing in the education of

girls yields significant economic, social, and sustainable benefits for nations. Educated girls become active contributors to the workforce, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. Moreover, girl-child education plays a crucial role in poverty reduction, as educated girls are empowered to break the cycle of poverty and create a better future for themselves and their communities.

### Top of Form

## 8 Recommendations

The following recommendations arising from the research are proffered.

The government should enhance its efforts to significantly subsidize tuition fees, particularly in public schools, to promote girl-child education.

Both government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate in coordinating and facilitating greater awareness and sensitization campaigns targeting parents, especially those who are uneducated. These campaigns should highlight the dangers and consequences of poor girl-child education on immediate communities and society at large.

Public enlightenment campaigns emphasizing the importance of girl-child education should be implemented, accompanied by initiatives to address cultural taboos and constraints. These campaigns should also address social and medical complications associated with early marriages and teenage pregnancy.

Measures should be taken to reduce poverty to the barest minimum, this will enable parents to afford to send their girl-children to school.

There should be a focus on recruiting more female teachers who can serve as role models for girl-children, fostering their aspirations and providing them with positive examples to emulate.

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