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# ENVIRONMENT AND THE GIRL CHILD EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

*Education is seen as the crucial tool for national development. Thus the Nigeria constitution of 1999 recognizes education as the fundamental human rights for every citizenry, in line with universal declaration of human rights which states that education is the fundamental human rights to every child, regardless of gender. Therefore the importance of the Girl-child education to the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. The relevance of girl-child education include: reduction of inequality, increase in productivity and earnings, reduction of poverty. improvement of health and nutrition. Environment factors that affect the girl-child were also examine; the family structure/size, socio-economic status of the home, nutrition of the home, discipline in home and academic qualification of parents. In Nigeria, the girl child education is confronted with many problems among which are; poverty, inadequate funds, sexual harassment, early marriage, and misconception on cultures and traditions. The paper recommends among others that the right acts should be strengthened and implemented in all states, the law prohibiting early child marriage should be enacted, free education should be provided for the girl child and adequate funds to be release for effective management ofthe girl child education.*

Keywords: Environment, Girl Child, Education and Sustainable development.

## Introduction

Education is recognized as the most crucial tool at mans disposal to develop his environment and his sustainability. The 1950 universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that everyone has a right to education. Girl-child education is a necessity for the empowerment of the female child. It enables them to know and claim their rights and prepare them for the future responsibilities and obligations. Due to some traditional and cultural practices the girl child is often discriminated upon right from birth to adulthood. In Nigeria, there are lots of gender discrepancies, as a result, many female children are left uneducated. Due to ignorant of the parents, they take the girl child education as a waste of resources. The belief is that the girl child is the man's property.



Educating the girl child is of paramount importance, this is supported with the adage, which says, when you train a girl, you have trained a nation. Thus investing in their education and developing their potential and capabilities are important issues that need to be handled diligently. Due to unfavourable cultures and traditions for the girl child, often times they see themselves as inferior in the society, coupled with some of the duties they found themselves doing-house keepers, house-maids, procreation etc. The earlier the girl child is given the rightful position, the better for the nation's development. Because few women who have seen opportune to exhibit their potentials have proved that what man can do, women can do it better. So for the sustainable development of any nation, the girl child should be given the optimal recognition.

### **Concept of Education**

Education is a crucial instrument for development. It provides an individual to live a dynamic society and contributes to such changes and constantly promotes the survival and development of the society .Ikoko (2004) opines that the advancement in technological know-how and other scientific breakthrough, which have elevated the standards of living in recent past, owe its credit to education. Thus the future of national development and integration lies in the ability of all segment of the society. FME (2004) describes education as an instrument par excellence for national development.

Moody (2006) in Nwaham (2015) sees education as a social process in which one achieves social competence and individual growth carried on in a selected, controlled setting which can be institutionalized as a school or college Osagiede and Umeri (2008) state that Education is a vehicle for socio-economic and political transformation, a veritable means for national development in all its ramifications, and an indispensable instrument par excellence for National policy and for the unification of the diverse elements that constitute a given territorial boundary, nation or sub-region. Education is the most powerful weapon in the world because no nation in the world over has ever attained fame or a particular height in terms of development without education as its bedrock, which is engendered by sound educational ideals.

### **Concept of Environment**

Effective Teaching and learning processes can only take place in a



conducive academic environment. The environment of the learner comprises the school and outside the school and it has an influence on the learning capability of the learner. Ororho (2008) sees environment as people, surrounding external conditions influencing development or growth of the people or nation. People mean parents, teachers, students and other adults living within a given community. According to Christopher (1987) in Ororho (2008) environment could be restrictive, democratic and intellectual. Restrictive environment is when the child has no opportunity to interact with his immediate environment on the other hand, democratic environment is a situation that enables the child to participate in the social facilities and others available within the community, which is significant to emotional and educational attainment, while intellectual environment is the school where formal learning takes place.

Ochoma (2006) sees environment as anything outside of an individual that has effect on him. This could be physical or social. The physical environment comprises the people, house, classroom conditions etc while the social environment is the relationship that exist between the individual and his physical environment. He further stated that the environment, be it physical or social, wherein a learner finds himself can make or mar the entire learning process. Hence, good and conducive environment cannot be compromised. It is mandatory that every learner should get a conducive environment for learning to avoid boredom, depression, frustration, dejection and unwillingness to learn.

Environment can also be seen as the sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, in addition to natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage. Didactic Encyclopedia Views environment as a system consisting of natural and artificial elements that are interacted and which are modified by human action. It is the environment that affects the way of life of the society including natural, social and cultural values that exist in a place and time. Living things, soil, water, air, physical objects made by man and the symbolic elements (as traditions) make up the environment. The conservation of this is essential to the sustainable life of current generations and generations. Environment include physical factors (Climate and Geology), Biological (human population, flora, fauna, water) and socio-economic (employment, urbanization, social conflicts).

Okoye (1998) listed the following as the various types of environment.



- a. **Pre-Natal Environment:** This is the environment of the child after conception. Here the child as a foetus reacts to the sum total of the intra-cellular interaction within the environment of the mother womb. The environment subjects the foetus to a very delicate condition as any exposure to adverse condition in the pre-natal environment may cause an abortion or damage resulting in abnormalities and death. In most cases, a rich pre-natal environment lays a solid foundation for the normal and healthy development of the foetus and eventually serves as the initial catalyst for the proper development of the cognitive structure.
- b. **Physical Environment:** Immediately after birth, the child is subjected to the environment. This environment results from the individual's exposure to the physical world around him. The physical environment of a child can be found in his home, the market, the village square, the school; the town where the child stays and other places where he visits or goes to stay. It varies from one person to the other, even in the same family and amongst towns. Differences in development may be due to a host of causes all which are environmental. Exposure to different physical environment results in different experiences amongst pupils in the same class. These differences will generate different reactions from the pupils when exposed to the teaching process in the classroom.
- c. **Emotional Or Psychological Environment:** This is the environment that affects the emotional perception of an individual. Its seat of reaction is in the central nervous system and is manifested in such areas as anger, fear, happiness, uneasiness etc. The emotional environment of an individual child affects his behavioural dispositions in the classroom and thus his ability to profit from the teaching process and also his relationship with his mates and the teacher. Poor emotional environment impedes learning.
- d. **Social Forces Environment:** This is the environment created by people associating with an individual. Such an environment can be found in the parents, peers, siblings, classmates, teachers etc. These set of people actively participate in the socialization of an individual and in such a way provide indices that may hinder or promote the learning ability of a child.



- e. **Rich or Normal Environment:** This is an imaginary concept used in psychology to mean an environment that helps the normal individual growth and development of a child. This environment has factors, conditions and elements that promote teaching and learning when looked at from the point of classroom situation. This type of environment is what every teacher should aim at so as to enhance the effectiveness of his efforts.
- f. **Depressed Environment:** This is an environment that lacks the basic elements that promote effective teaching and learning processes. It retards the intellectual growth of the child.

### **Environmental Factors**

Igbiwu and Nwaham (2008) enumerated some environmental factors which affect the growth and development of the child.

- a. **The Family Structure:** Family size refers to the number of people in a family: it includes the father, mother, biological children and extended family such as nephew, cousin, uncle, etc. The size of the family has influence on the development and performance of children. The influence may be positive or negative, large family size creates a lot of problem for the parents in the upbringing of their children. These problems include insufficient food, malnutrition, poor clothing, inadequate facilities, insufficient fund and disciplinary problem. All these problems affect the performance of children in the school.
- b. **Socio-Economic Status of the Home:** Socio-Economic status of parents has great effect on the life of children. Students whose parents have attained high socio-economic status tend to show a high level of educational performance. The poor performance of the children of lower status parents have been attributed to cognitive and linguistics inadequacies, value orientation and self-image that constitutes major handicap to educational achievement. Adequate educational facilities are provided in the home of children whose parents are rich and has great impact on the performance of children.
- c. **Nutrition of the Home:** Children need balanced and adequate diet for their growth and development. Children from poor home, who do not eat balance diet, are less active than those from rich home who are opportune to feed on rich diets. Thus, children feeding affect their learning abilities.



- d. **Discipline in Home:** Children are good emulators and imitators. They learn their standards of right and wrong, good and bad initially from home. The children like to find out limits for their behaviours, thus, the clear establishment of responsibilities for behaviour assist the child to know how to behave. There is no doubt that children from disciplined homes perform better than those from homes with crisis.
- e. **Opportunity for Rest, Work and Play:** There is a saying that all work no play makes e. Jack a dull boy. So for children to be active in school there is need to create opportunity for rest and play. Resting also help to cool the brain and protect it from stress.
- f. **Academic Qualification of Parents:** Educated parents have been known to have firmer grip on their children than their illiterate counterparts and this is so because of the knowledge they have of the workings in the school system, their appreciation of the virtues of education and most importantly the ability to monitor their children's progress in school.
- g. **Health Environment:** Cleanliness is next to godliness. A healthy person is a wealthy person, therefore the need to maintain clean environment cannot be over-emphasized. Clean and healthy environment reduce the occurrence ill-health and infectious diseases. The home and school environment must be free from dangerous objects that can endanger thelives of the children. There is no doubt that clean and healthy environments enhance children performance.
- h. **Home Background:** Home background of the child affects his/her performance. Children from troubled homes with many crises cannot perform well. Examples of these crises are bullying, divorce, death, incessant quarrels, and all these affect the child's learning ability.

### Who Is The Girl Child?

The girl child is a female child from birth, later grown into a young immature woman. Especially an unmarried one and should not be denied the right to education. The girl child is seen as a female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This includes the period of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence state of development. She is also seen as a female person who will eventually grow into a woman, get married and bear her own children. The gender

apartheid placed the girl-child in a disadvantaged position, suppresses her potentials and destroys her self-actualization, thereby making her become





a victim of pre-existing socio-cultural male and chauvinism (such character that subjects the girl-child to multiple operation, exploration and discrimination).

### **Girl Child Education**

Often times the girl education, is affected by tradition, cultures and religion. This is not supposed to be because education is the fundamental human right that should be availed to all citizens irrespective of age, sex, nationality. This is in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Right (1948).The greatest favour one can do to himself or herself is "to get education" and to others "to give them education". Education is the greatest and best legacy that a parent can bequest his/her child.

Every citizenry (male/female) has the right to education and skill acquisition. The right to choice and self-actualization, but this is hardly obtainable.

Many girls are deprived from getting formal education immediately they are between the ages of 12-14 years; hey are given out for marriage. Backing the idea with the philosophy that the woman's place is in her husband kitchen and her primary role centers on her home. This has kept many girls away from school. According to Lawal (2016), the child's Right Act of 2003 prohibits child marriage and betrothals. In section 21 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, any marriage contracted by anyone less than 18 years old is invalid, hence the provision of Basic Education for the accessibility of education. The act is aimed at facilitating the realization and protection of the rights of all children. In the quest to achieve the objectives of world conference on education for all (EFA) and millennium development goals (MDGS), Nigeria also enacted the Universal Basic Education (UBE). Law which provides for a nine years (9) free and compulsory basic education to fast-track education intervention at the primary and junior secondary school levels.

The Nigerian government has been working, in active collaborations with international development partners such as the UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID,world Bank as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOS) to achieve the EFA/UBE goals. Gender equity in education has been one of the main goals targeted by Nigeria since the 1990 world conference on education for all (EFA) in Jomteen, Thailand. This commitment has been renewed in several international fora, including the





United Nations Decade for Girls Education Initiative (UNGEL).

In support of strategy for accelerating girl's education in Nigeria (SAGEN), other major partners are also reinforcing their efforts for girl's education. The World Bank has recently recruited a focal point for girl education, UNESCO has commissioned research in this area. United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) has been supporting girls education to ensure that more girls remain in school longer and USAID are considering Nigeria, as such schools often recent more girls than boys.

### Importance Of Girl Child Education

The best legacy of every society is to have a peaceful/enlightened, knowledgeable and socially coherent life in order to achieve development and growth in all sectors within their environment. The only way to achieve this is through having sound builders of that society, who are those builders, it is the girl child the future mother (Maryam, 2014). Education is paramount, it is the light that shows the way by removing the darkness of ignorance as education is the salt that gives the taste of life. Education bestows on girls a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skill. Education recognizes and helps unlock the potentials in every child. When a girl is educated, a nation is also educated. This is so because the education of every child starts from the family and the mother is the first teacher. Educating the girl child. produces mother who will in turn educate their children, care for their families, and provide for their children financially. Education of the girl child leads to better health for the future generation, reduction in child mobility and mortality. Orji (2011) enumerated the following as the importance of girl child education to nation building.

- **Reduces Inequality:** Education is a great “Leveler”, illiteracy being one of the strongest predictors of poverty primary education plays a catalytic role for those most likely to be poor, including girls, ethnic minorities, organs, disabled people, and rural families. By enabling larger numbers to share in the growth process, education can be the powerful tide that lifts all hoats.
- **Increases productivity and earnings:** There is no gain saying that education improves and increases one's life and productivity in any sector he/she operates.
- **Drives economic competitiveness:** An educated and skilled workforce is one of the pillars of the knowledge based economy, Increasingly,



comparative advantages among nations come less from natural resources or cheap labour and more from technical innovations and the competitive use of knowledge, education contributes to improve productively which in theory should lead to higher income and improved economic performance.

- **Poverty – reducing effects:** Education helps to reduce poverty, promote gender equality, lower child mortality rates, protect against HIV/AIDs, reduce fertility rates, and enhance environmental awareness.
- **Improves Health and nutrition:** Education greatly benefits personal health. Particularly powerful for girls, it profoundly affects reproductive health and also improves child mortality and welfare through better nutrition and higher immunization rates.
- **Contributes democratization:** Countries with greater education gap between rates of boys and girls schooling tend to enjoy greater democracy. Democratic political institutions (such as power-sharing and clean elections) are more likely to exist in countries with higher literacy rates and education levels.
- **Reduces women's fertility:** Women with formal education are much more likely to use reliable family planning methods, delay marriage and child bearing, and have fewer and healthier babies than women with no formal education.
- **Lower Infant and Child Mortality Rates**  
Women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished.
- **Lowers material mortality rates**  
Women with formal education tend to have better knowledge about health care practices, are less likely to become pregnant at every young age, tend to have fewer, better spaced pregnancies, and seek pre and post-natal care.
- **Protects against HIV/AIDS:** Girls education ranks among the most powerful tools for reducing girls vulnerability. It slows and reduces the spread of HIV/AIDs by contributing to female economic independence, delayed marriage, family planning, and work outside the home as well as greater information about the disease and how to prevent it.
- **Increases Women's Labour Force participation rates and earnings:** Education has been proven to increase income for wage earners and



increase productivity for employers. yielding benefits for the community and society.

- **Creates Intergeneration Education Benefits:** Mothers education is a significant variable affecting children's education attainment and opportunities.

#### **Other importance of the girl child education includes:**

- Increase in involvement of political process
- Decrease domestic and sexual violence
- Decrease support for militancy
- Improve socio-economic growth.

#### **Factors affecting Girl child education**

The girl child education is confronted by many factors or challenges, Some of these factors include:

- **Poverty:** Poverty is a deadly disease that inflicts a lot of pain on the girl child. The poor socio-economic status of the parents affects the education of the girl child. On the other hand, educating the girl child will liberate her from poverty.
- **Cultural misconception:** The traditional belief that the male child is superior to the female child, affects the education of the girl child. Parents prefer to train the male child than the female child.
- **Domestic responsibility:** The girl child, is confined to domestic chores, she is considered to only fit in at the kitchen and the house, and not educated. The role she feels must be done is the house keeping in the place of her education. This mentality affects the orientation and the potentiality of the girl child.
- **Education of Parents:** Illiterate parents do not see the need for the education of the girl child. Since she will end up being married to her husband.
- **Lack of fund:** The girl child may not be educated because of lack of funds from her parents. The little fund available is preferably spent on the education of the male child.
- **Early Marriage:** In some cultures, the girl child is given out for marriage as early as 12 years. This will invariably affect her education. Worst still, the girls are given in marriage to old men who can be their grandfathers.
- **Religion:** Some religion like the Islamic Religion belief that the girl child role is to rear children, hence they are given out in marriage at a very



tender age.

- **Sexual Harassment:** Most girls are faced with sexual abuse from relatives and neighbours. This affects their education.

### **Girl-Child Education As A Tool For National Development**

Education has been seen as the most crucial tool necessary for the national development and the citizenry according 1999 constitution of Nigeria. Education is the fundamental human right of every Nigerian. This is in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations, which states that education is one of the fundamental human rights. Every child, regardless of gender, has a right to. According to peace (2014) girl-child education is the key to the empowerment of the female child, it allows them to claim their rights and prepare them for the future to assume responsibility as duty bearers for the next generation. In most societies, the female child is often discriminated upon, right from birth to adulthood due to some traditional and cultural practices. Due to ignorance and misconception about the girl child, they are left uneducated unlike the male child. Parents feel that educating the child is a wasteful resources since the girl child is the property of the husband.

The education of the girl child is also affected by poverty. The low economic status of parents affects the education of the girl child and most parents will prefer to use available fund to educate the male child. The female child is saddled with the problem of funding the family by involving them in hawking of goods with all the risks involve. The girl child is also harassed by teachers and other men which may lead to withdrawal from school especially when pregnancy is involved, thereby terminating the education of the girl child.

Peace (2014) also opined that the education of the girl-child is very vital as it enables her to accomplish things that she cannot otherwise. The girl child armed with the weapon of education, she learns and applies information, attitudes, values, and skills, previously unavailable to her. The education of the girl is, therefore, very necessary in view of the benefits that will accrue to her, her immediate family, her community and the larger society.

**Other importance of the girl child education to national development includes:**



- Girl child education leads to maintenance of healthy families.
- It teaches the girl child the importance of keeping herself and her household clean and safe.
- Promotion of employment of female teachers to serve as role models and increase parents confidence that their female children will not face sexual harassment in school. To harness to the potentiality of the girl child, the militating factors against the girl-child education should be eradicated. There is no gain saying that the girl children has a lot to contribute to the rational development.

## **Conclusion**

The relevance of educating the girl child are numerous. Only an educated girl child can have the right knowledge for social interaction, self improvement and status advancement. And educated girl child can identify her right and demand for it. She stands the better chance to be a good citizen and a nation builder.

The girl child education is confronted by some factors, among which are: poverty, educational background of parents, lack of funds, cultural and traditional conception, religious factors ,sexual harassment, and early marriage. When these challenges are tackled, the girl child will optimally contribute to national development.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the discourse, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. The child's Rights Act should be strengthened and implemented in all states.
- ii. Government should provide adequate policies in favour of the girl child education.
- iii. The law prohibiting early marriage should be implemented. The girl-child should not be given out for marriage until the age of 18 years.
- iv. The UBE Act of 2004 prohibiting the girl child from hawking should be enforced.
- v. The girl child education should be made free to encourage them.
- vi. Adequate facilities should be provided for the girl child education.
- vii. Sexual education should be given to girl-child.
- viii. Sanction should be given to parents who give out their female children to early marriage.

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