

ENHANCING GIRL CHILD HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH RELIGIOUS AND MORAL STUDIES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The role of girl-child in national development of any country cannot be under estimated. However, religious and moral studies are one of the educational aspects that can be used to re-emphasize and re-awaken the minds of people on the undisputable value of girl-child as a tool for sustainable national development. The method used in this study is historical which enabled the researcher to trace the negligence of girl-child education and the efficacy of those given the opportunity to acquire knowledge. The paper discusses some challenges against the laudable objectives of girl-child education for national development such as socio-cultural factors, early marriage, poverty and so on. The paper examines the notion of national development; the need for enhancing girl-child higher education through religious and moral education which when looked into would enhance the girl-child in the world of excellence and productivity for national development. It also discusses the importance and role of religious and moral education to women education. The paper among other things suggest that since the roles played by girls or women in national development are of great value, they should be allowed good religious and moral education opportunities to higher institution to enhance their social, economic and political participation towards enhanced national development because religion and moral itself help in the building of a veral society.

Introduction:

Enhancing Girl-Child higher education through religious and moral studies for national development will help in imparting moral values into the girls for descent and good society. It is so because religion from its origin and nature teaches morality which shapes character. The importance of religious and moral studies for girls' higher education is unavoidable since religion is embedded in the heart of human behavior which can equally assist in the foundation of a national development.

Education is widely recognized and considered as a bedrock for the development of any nation. In a nation of ours, girls and women are expected to contribute effectively to the development of the country. For a "Being" and national development, it is necessary and proper that girls and women should acquire education especially [Moral education] to be well fitted in the society. In line with this, Olaleye [2008] states that in the last two decades, debates on the status of women and the need to integrate them into development process of any nation have ranged on at national and international workshop, seminars and fora among others.

Unfortunately, when you take a look at women's involvement in education in Nigeria, particularly in the North, it shows relatively low despite all the laudable goals and objectives of education. In this region of the country, women still suffer a lot of constraints which hinder their personal and national development. On this note, Akinola [2013] remarks that the Girl-child right to education is an economic, social and cultural rights, as well as a civil and political right since people cannot fully realize their freedom without education. Like all human rights, the context of girls' right to education can be found in our local legislation and international commitments. However, the girl-child bears double jeopardy: she suffers first as a child, then the discrimination that comes as a result of being a girl-child.

Besides, it is disheartening to note that disparity in access to education is still in favour of the male children in various programmes put in place by the government to promote girl-child education [Umar and Gbana, 2004]. For example, according to ACTIONAID Nigeria report [2007], the girl-child in northern Nigeria is a glaring double disadvantaged individual, given her sex and age. The girl-child in this region of Nigeria is surrounded with a culture and social setting that acknowledged or appreciate the value of girls' education. The social-cultural set up not only encourages social exclusion and gender difference, but additionally brings to bear the results of institutionalized patriarchal practices hidden under the culture and religion to enforce injustice and unfair distribution of chances, thereby obstructing the development of educational policies capable of giving the girls right to education.

To buttress the above point further according to the Nigerian Literacy Rates Survey [2007] in Adeniran,[2006], the overall percentage of educated females is 41% and males, 65%. The female literacy estimates for the South-West is 53% and South-East 60%, there are clearly above the national average of 32% which is considerably below the national estimate of 75% for the male in both zones. Again, the literacy estimate of 22% for females in both North – East and North – West is far below the 40% estimate for males in both zones. Infact, girls in the northern part of the country are always not encouraged to go in for scientific and technological training and education. Hence, it reduces the knowledge they needed for their daily lives and their employment opportunities which of course leads to under- development of the nation.

Enhancing girl-child higher education through religious and moral studies for national development implies that the girl-child should be given quality education for her to be integrated into the developing process in other to be co-partners in the national development. This is so because, the knowledge of moral instructions in higher institutions will enable the girl-child discerning between what is morally good and morally bad. The ability to choose correctly as a result of moral instruction acquired helps the girl-child to desist from immoral acts like robbery, terrorism, kidnapping etc. and this makes them unable to contribute effectively and progressively to the development of the nation.

By and large, girls and women should be allowed and fully integrated into training and education to enable them fit into social and political status as a means of developing the nation's human resources for national economic development.

Conceptual Clarifications:

The Girl-Child:

The girl-child according to Hornby [2000] Advanced Learner's Dictionary is a female child, daughter, unmarried woman that is below the age of eighteen. In other words, it is the age before one becomes a young adult and that this period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood [0 – 5 years] and primary [6 – 12] [Gistarea, 2013]. He went further to say that during this period; the young girl is totally under the care of the adult who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings. This is made up of infancy, childhood, early and adolescent stages of development and that at this period too, the girl-child is given proper training, she builds and develops her potentials. The girl child therefore could be seen as a female child, a girl-woman or a girl-mother who has not reached the age of adult and which was described by International Development Partners as a female child of school age that needs to have the basic human capabilities for her up-keep.

Girl – Child Education:

Girl-child education is a process of educating the girl-child or acquiring knowledge not only in reading and writing but also utilize the skills acquired to enable them become efficient and effective personalities, thus improving their livelihood and overall well-being and the society at large

Education:

Education, according to Onyeagwu [2014] is a process which provides the young ones and even the aged the knowledge, skills and values which the society deems necessary. He went further to state that the strength of any nation lies on the quality of education she can afford to provide for her citizens. This means that quality education improves the quality of the workforce thereby raising the level of its skills and efficiency. Little wonder, Nzeakor [2009] asserts that quality education gives a nation access to the world's body of knowledge and also facilitates technological advancement of such a nation. Education, in all ramifications of life, has been a veritable tool for reawakening in the people the efficacy for consciousness in its use for efficient and effective national development. Infact, education is a light that shows to human beings the way to follow. The importance of education is not just to read and write but gives rational thinking, knowledge, ability and self-sufficiency.

Religious Studies

Religion is a universal feature. Irrespective of where one comes from, one has no doubt seen how religion has affected and influenced one's life. Religious studies is the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours and institutions. It describes, compares, interprets and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historical and cross-cultural perspective [McBrien, 1994].

Religious studies is the teaching of religions in general and its varied aspects – its beliefs, doctrines, rituals, customs as "laws" rites and personal roles. It is also the imparting of religious values through the process of passing information of knowledge that contributes to the development and growth of humanity and the safe keeping of the society [Jump, 2005]. Religious studies is also a process of educating students or school children on religious matters such as norms and values that help in the moulding of the students' character.

Religious studies is the teaching of religion that has to do with the beliefs in the existence of a Supernatural Being. It is an important phenomenon of the social system that embraces a set of belief and practices influencing the behavior of people and simultaneously, uniting the system together for the growth, upliftment and development of the people.

Moral Education:

Moral education according to Lawal [2002] is the process of guiding the characters and development of an individual in the society in order for him or her to be able to do what is right or just. It also strives to teach standards of right or wrong as well as their application to individual lives.

Osajie [2014], in Iwenofu [2010] sees moral education as that, which helps people appreciate common values such as honesty, liberty, justice, fairness and respect for others. Moral Studies then enables children acquire those moral studies that will assist them individually live good lives and at the same time become productive to the nation. It thus, contributes not only to the students as individuals but also to the social pulling together of a nation.

National Development:

National development has been defined by many authors in diverse ways. Anyway, whatever the perspective, development is seen as a positive change in economic, political and social-cultural institutions which is transformed in order to improve the standard of living in the society. Osokoya [2008] sees national development as the development of a nation's human and material resources and education is perhaps the only means to prepare individuals for participation in national development. In line with this, Oyitso and Olomukoro [2012], sees development in terms of human potentials and capabilities in the context of relations with other social groups. He also stated that development means greater understanding of social, economic and political process, enhanced competence to analyze and solve problems of day – to – day living, expansion of manual skill, greater control over economic resources, restoration of human dignity, self respect and equality. However, whatever definitions people might give, enhancing girl-child higher education through religious studies will go a long way in inculcating morality into the girl-child which fosters the phenomenon of development even though development is seen by majority as the sum total of everything good that man has initiated right from time.

The Girl-child Education Development Project:

The girl-child educational development project can be efficiently and effectively achieved by adopting and implementing well planned and organized educational workshops and seminars. The girls and women want greater means to educational endeavours, skills acquisition and ways for them to excel. To this effect, developmental projects are to set be up for them to improve on their standard of living and to give them opportunities that will enhance their development and society at large. This is done in other to reduce the gender inequality between a girl child and a male child. To rectify this, in Nigeria today, different programmes are set up to improve the social, economic, political, cultural, civic and welfare development of girls and women.

UNESCO [2004], in its definition of education implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes and knowledge.

UNICEF, a lead agency of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative, is committed to making sure that the issue of girls education remains paramount at the top of its agenda in Nigeria thus helping the country to reach two key Millennium Development goals. That is, the removal of gender inequality in education and achievement of Universal Basic Education.

Furthermore, in December, 2004, Girls Education Project [GEP] was launched as a joint initiative between the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Department of International Development [DFID] and UNICEF which is centered on achieving improved quality of life of girls in Nigeria through a collaborative, inter-sectorial approach to girls' education. This purpose was to remove gender inequality in education via improving the quality of life of girls in Nigeria by a collaborative approach to girl's education.

Another educational development project is the National Commission for Mass Literacy Adult and Non-Formal Education [NMEC] designed in 1991 by the Federal Government, making them to eliminate illiteracy in the country. The girls and women are mainly put in the programmes of the commission with many literacy classes being conducted everywhere in the country. In line with this, Ojobo [2008] remarked that many Christian and Muslim woman's organizations are active in offering adult and non-formal educational opportunities to women; so are many other NGOs such as officers' Wives Associations of Nigeria Armed Forces [Army, Navy and Air Force].

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative [UNGEI] which promoted the enrolment of more girls in school under the African Girls' Education Initiative [AGEI] with financial support of the Norwegian government was also put in place to promote women's status [Opeke, 2008].

The initiative of school Tutoring, Mentoring and Counselling [STUMEC] was equally one of the methods used by UNICEF in the intervention project. This was designed in supporting children especially girls in the Northern Nigeria throughout their learning period to assist them in learning achievement and retention in schools. Incentives such as provision of uniform and instructional materials and scholarships for the Girl-Child were offered to arouse the girls taking part in formal education. Therefore, enhancing girl child higher education through religious studies for national development can be achieved in taking active role in the above literacy projects and the use of the skills acquired thereby improving their livelihood.

The Need for Enhancement of Girl-Child Higher Education through Religious and Moral Studies for National Development.

Morality which is embedded in religion promotes societal development by inculcating essential values which humanity in general consider as important to the enhancement of peace and progress in the society. Thus, the enhancing of the girl child higher education will be meaningless without the role of religion because religion itself lays emphasis on moral consciousness which is the life wire of any successful society. However, since Nigeria educational system today is characterized by social vices, religion has to be given a priority because a moral conscience in human beings makes the individual think better, act better and amendable to the dictates of consciousness. With morality, the girl child will live a good life that will promote her living for the growth and development of the nation.

Relationship between education and development, according to Imhabekahi and Olomukoro [2007] is that literacy is a basic instrument in social transformation and modernization. He further states that it influences the rate of development and its possession or otherwise facilitates or retards the level of development. To buttress this, National policy of Education [2004] states that education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about redress, it is the greatest investment that the nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political and human resources. Ezegbe and Akubue [2012], opine that any society which neglects women in her human resources development cannot achieve any meaningful development. The described African Traditional Society women as being hardworking and resourceful.

In line with the above, UNESCO [2006], discussing the role of women in Africa asserts that the major obstacle to African development cannot be overcome without the full participation of women. Any society which is seriously committed to raising standard of living, should consider moral upright women not as marginal to development process but as essential human resources. This, in effect, means that women are indispensable in development especially in Agricultural food production.

The girls or women's moral education is one of the most important tools that can be used for the development of a nation. This can make an enormous difference to a woman's chances of finding well-paid work, raising a healthy family and preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV and AIDs [UNICEF, 2004 in Isife [2013]. Also, morally educated woman will help her children with their school assignments, enlighten them in their school work and inquire about the academic performance of her children. This, no doubt, will enhance a happy home, well educated and well behaved children and satisfied husbands which equally can elevate the home positively and bring progress to the society.

Girl-child, if well and morally educated will be able to help in nation building and reconstruction. This could be seen especially in a few of them that are currently holding powerful positions in Nigeria and in the world. The 1978 General Conference of UNESCO meeting stated that; increasing educational opportunities for women boost equity and foster national development. The potential contribution of educated and trained women to labour force and the importance of their education in the improvement of family welfare and planning are factors still underestimated in national development [Ojobo, 2008].

Ojobo also states that mothers contribute in no small measure in securing perfect health for the children and by so doing, elevate the entire community and nation. Obtaining good health starts from the pregnant mother who knows and takes balance diet, abhorring damaging drugs and actions inimical to the health of the baby. A woman is able to know this because of being educated, since most of the enlightenment campaigns against diseases are transmitted either through the radio, television, newspapers, posters, magazines or in local languages or English language. If the girls are morally educated, they will have knowledge of basic care and will be in a position to help others.

Educating girls and women morally is necessary for overcoming poverty with regards to vocational education. The right of women to be self made and self-employed can be done through the acquisition of vocational works that are well acquainted in their locations. This enables them to be engaged in small scale business which of course reduces the case of poverty and unemployment among women in the society. Since this education reduces poverty, it therefore means that women who are care givers at home when morally educated will improve the health of their families and this too, can strengthen the nation's health and builds the foundation for sustainable economic growth.

Through religion and moral studies, the girls and women will know their rights and will be able to contribute effectively to the development of the society. In line with this, Tsauri [2010] avers that the cultural mores and folkways of a society are transmitted more effectively through its women than its men. It is mother who gives children their training in correct social attitude, conscience, morals and manners, since they spend their formative years together before they are of conventional school age. Therefore, enhancing girl-child higher education through religious studies for national development will provide them the ability to adopt and adjust into the modern changing society rather than being illiterate that gives room for these girls and women to be suicide bombers.

Challenges against Girl-Child Higher Education through Religious and Moral Studies for National Development.

Despite the laudable and remarkable achievement of women, Nigerian girls and women still remain relatively downgraded in their abilities to play a decisive and major role in the socio-political and economic development of the nation. The identification of self as "Male" or "Female" is an aspect of early child learning and education which also assign sex-roles in the consciousness of the child. To this effect, Agu [2007] blames the colonial authorities for setting a dangerous stage and precedence for the weakening of the influence and role of women through what has been described as the "abrogation of the social stability" which the Nigerian society had enjoyed before the coming and intrusion of the British colonialists. The effect of this is the downgrade of the functions of women in the Nigeria society, especially in the areas of leadership and political duty.

In Nigerian society, the girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood to adulthood. Traditional practices and culture treat the girl-child as "inferior" to the boy-child and socialize her likewise thereby undermining her self esteem.

Also, women occupy lower positions than men in the social structure, which is mostly patriarchal. On this ground, Oyewumi [2002] states that girls are often treated as inferior to boys, both within the home and by society. They are socialized to put themselves last, which in turn undermines their self-esteem and their ability to reach their full potentials as human beings. The responsibility of the girl-child in African society has been placed by the ideology of patriarchy which is defined as the belief in the natural superiority of the male-sex and dominance of the male-child.

Umar and Gbana [2004] also remark that in Nigeria, women are expected to play the second fiddle and to take up low status jobs. They traditionally have been debased and dishonoured by the fact that they are supposed to consider motherhood as the principal purposes of their existence. He further states that the girl-child is brain-washed by a life career in peasant farming or petty trading. Her picture elicits some empathy, haggard-looking ill, old and with almost balding hair that has dutifully responded to pressure from heavily laden baskets of farm produce.

The discrimination against the girl-child is so strong that some necessities are being denied them. For example, in the northern parts of the country, according to Egunyomi [2006] it was believed that the influence of formal education on the girl-child was not necessary and that those schools would westernize their lives and make them reject their traditional as well as their cultural ways of lives. To others too, when the girl-child is educated, it has no direct gain to the family but only to her husband, since she has to get married in no distance time. Therefore, the responsibility of training her should rest on her husband. So, that might be the basic reasons why only religious education is allowed to be pursued by the girl-child in the north.

Cultural and religious biases are yet another challenge hindering the girl child education as many Nigeria parents especially in large families with limited resources enroll boys in school instead of girls. On this note Chaturvedi and Nalima [2010] assert that:

"The Girl-child is taken as a burden on the family resources, whose contribution she will never be able to reimburse rather she creates liabilities. Her birth is a family's dignity under regarded result of luck and her presence is being regarded as a constant threat of dishonor. She is a body whose integrity is always at risk. She is a devalued being; who must be kept sheltered and prepared for the future of deprivation, conditioning her to accept these. She can be smart and clever in her sheltered world, but never an achiever in the open society. The knowledge streams which improve her social horizon are limited, because she is considered weak, dependant, helpless and powerless, she comes to be looked upon as an economic burden, a consumer rather than a producer both within and outside the household".

Yet another challenge to the girl-child moral education is the early marriage/teenage marriage early betrothal of a girl-child as a result of poverty in the family. Some parents say they refuse to enroll their girl-children in schools because they cannot cater for the cost of the schooling. Some send their girl-children to hawk in order to feed the home. Others do not for the fact that they cannot wait for the girl-children to graduate before giving them out in marriage. The denial of girl-child education in our society is threatening to undermine the prospect of future political, social and economic prosperity of our nation. Hence, Nussbaum [2000] opines that a girl-child in a natal family is frequently treated as dispensable, seeing that she will leave anytime and will not support parents in their old age. Along the way to her inevitable departure she will involve the family in the considerable expense of dowry and wedding facilities". What use will it be then to care for her health and education in the same way as one would care for the boy. What wonder that the birth of a girl is often an occasion of sorrow rather than for rejoicing! As the old Indian proverb puts it "A daughter born to husband or death, is already gone".

Conclusion:

The paper has examined how girl-child higher education through religious and moral studies can enhance national development socially and economically through quality education. Education, whether formal or non formal is the first agent of literacy that can bring about a level of development of the girl-child's educational status in any country. The higher the level of religious and moral studies for women, the more developed the nation. Therefore, religious and moral education helps to inculcate into human beings moral character without which there will be no value foundation in such a society. Thus, government, international development partners, civil society, non-governmental and private organizations should endeavour to ensure that women programmes towards national development should be highly given attention.

Religious and moral education also should be adopted as the foundation for a just education transformation. It provides the needed ingredients for sustainable educational development in the world and Nigeria in particular Osajie [2014]. Religious and moral education enables people, especially the girl child in the pursuit of education to desist from immoral acts and other social vices that are inimical to human endeavour. Therefore, religion and moral studies if followed and allowed to be studied up to higher institutions, encourage justice, love, peace in all human relationship which enhances the progress and promotion of the citizenry for national development. Conclusively, women are the heart of most societies irrespective of them working or not, they are very influential people in children's lives. Thus, educating girl-child through religious and moral studies is one of the most paramount ventures that any country can do for its future.

Recommendation:

Government is expected to promote the sound teaching of religious and moral studies as she emphasises on science and technology so that a new generation of improved citizens can be produced thereby having a well-structured and transformed nation.

Religious and moral studies should be made compulsory and included in the school curriculum at all levels of educational endeavour in order to impart moral instructions to the people, because with it, there will be self discipline which eventually will lead to the progress of people for national development.

The girl-children should strive to break the yoke of playing the role of second fiddle with great determination and perseverance.

The girls should not be denied the right of exposure, socialization and religious education as fundamental requirements for handling the numerous problems of adult life.

The Federal, state and local governments should work *pari-passu* to support the effective implementation of women education programmes in the country.

The importance of proper orientation to Nigerians, especially parents, community leaders or religious leaders should be addressed. This will serve as a way of improving and increasing the enrolment of the girl-children in schools.

The government should enact and enforce laws prohibiting girls from hawking in the street with penalties for the violators.

The government should enact a policy that will make girls to complete their schooling even though they are put in a family way before the end of their educational carrier. The educated women should make sure that there is awareness, orientation and sensitization for women in the rural areas via effective education programmes and mass media to improve their self-confidence.

Parents, guardians and the society should encourage and give opportunities for their girl-children enrolment in schools in order to tackle the challenge of illiteracy and acquire proper awareness of their potentials, rights and higher responsibilities in the society.

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