

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE INVOLVEMENT OF GIRL CHILD IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF NORTHERN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Education is an essential tool for empowering individuals, particularly girls, and women, and promoting social and economic development in Nigeria. However, gender disparities persist in access to education, particularly for girls. The involvement of the girl child in educational policy in Nigeria is essential to address these disparities and ensure that girls have equal opportunities to access education and achieve their full potential. The Nigerian government has made significant efforts to address the gender gap in education through various policies and programs. One such is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which aims to provide free, compulsory, and quality education to all children aged 6-15 years, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religion. The program has contributed to increased enrollment rates among girls, particularly in the northern region of Nigeria. Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in achieving gender equity in education in Nigeria. To this

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end, this paper examines the challenges of the involvement of girls' children in the northern part of Nigeria in its educational policy, with; the persistence of cultural and social attitudes that prioritize boys' education over girls'. These attitudes often manifest in early marriages, child labor, and gender-based violence, which prevent girls from accessing education or force them to drop out of school. The paper concludes by addressing these challenges with recommendations such as the concerted effort by the policymakers to bridge or eradicate the disparities of gender norms and promote girls' education as a priority.

Keywords: Education, Girls, Disparities, Policy, and Northern Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

In Nigeria, the full realization of the education of the girl child faces challenges. Factors such as cultural biases favoring boys' education, early marriages, gender-based violence, child labor, and poverty contribute to this issue, particularly prevalent in the northern region. Education is traditionally seen as a valuable pursuit in societies, yet the girl child's education involves becoming a functional member of her community, acquiring knowledge, realizing potential, and contributing to self-actualization and societal well-being.¹

¹Kobani Doreen, "The Impact of Girl-Child Education on Community Development: A Study of Ika Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State" (2014). *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol 4. Pp 2225-2484.

The 1999 Nigerian Constitution stipulates the right to education for every child, irrespective of gender, with provisions for free and compulsory education up to 15 years.²

Investing in girl child education is instrumental in reducing inequality, illiteracy, and poverty. It equips girls to take advantage of opportunities, understand their legal and reproductive rights, and contribute meaningfully to economic growth. Educating girls results in a more informed and economically independent female population, fostering national development.³

However, challenges persist, especially in Northern Nigeria, where socio-cultural factors, religious misinterpretations, poverty, and outdated attitudes hinder girl-child education. Bridging this educational disparity is crucial for dismantling discrimination and promoting equitable treatment of females, enabling them to participate fully in national progress and global advancements. Understanding the definition of the girl-child as a female from birth to adulthood emphasizes the importance of guidance and care during her journey from infancy to maturity.⁴

Girl-child education aligns with the broader concept of women's education, emphasizing its integral role in gender-focused learning and development. Addressing the disparities in girl-child education requires tackling socio-cultural barriers and fostering an environment that values and supports the education of every child, regardless of gender.⁵ This paper discusses the

² Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. Chapter 2. See section 18(3A).

³ Okorie Mercy, "An Assessment of Factors Militating against Girl Child Education in Nigeria" (2017). *International Journal of Advanced and Multidisciplinary Social Science*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 49-54. doi 10.5923/j.jamss.20170302.03. Accessed 9 August 2023.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

brief overview of northern Nigeria and shows the significance of girl child education in the northern Nigeria. The article also discuss the involvement of the northern girl child in educational policy in Nigeria by investigating their involvement through the theory of social constructivist. The challenges of the northern girl child in accessing education. The article conclude by making recommendations which include incentives like expedited promotions for rural educators, increased salaries or stipends, hardship allowances, transport support, and secure, well-constructed housing should be encouraged to attract and retain teachers in rural areas amongst others.

2.00 A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF NORTHERN NIGERIA

The northern region of Nigeria serves as a major hub for agricultural endeavors, with subsistence farming, commercial crop cultivation, and livestock rearing, particularly cattle husbandry, constituting the predominant occupations.⁶ However, formal or Western education remains uncommon in the North, with a considerable number of Northerners lacking proper formal education. It's not uncommon to find instances where only around ten individuals within an entire local government area sit for the national common entrance examination, a pivotal test for transitioning from primary to secondary education. This dearth of secondary school entrants subsequently translates to

⁶Almu, Bello & Adesina, Miracle & Kanmodi, Kehinde, “ Northern Nigeria: An overview”.2019.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327915628_Northern_Nigeria_An_overview/citation/download accessed 13 August 2023.

fewer individuals progressing to tertiary institutions. Despite governmental efforts such as free education and scholarships for studying abroad, these opportunities remain underutilized. Illiteracy rates have surged in northern Nigeria.⁷

Gender-based disparities also emerge, with males in certain areas more likely to access formal education. In contrast, females are often oriented towards early marriage, with some marrying as young as twelve or thirteen. Their educational pursuits are curtailed by their spouses, who hinder their continuation of studies. Moreover, males, especially in cattle-rearing regions, face restricted access to formal education. Sons of cattle rearers are groomed to inherit their family's cattle business, leaving them with limited time for schooling.⁸

Terrorist activities, notably by the "Boko Haram" group, which translates to "No to Western education," further jeopardize formal education in the northern region. Acts like the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls are in direct conflict with educational values, resulting in parents hesitating to enroll their children in schools. This escalates the already scarce access to education.⁹

Other professions requiring formal education, such as roles in educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and financial establishments, remain under-occupied due to the high illiteracy rate among the northern population. Insecurity concerns also deter individuals from working in this region.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

2.01 SIGNIFICANCE OF GIRLCHILD EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Girls have the rightful entitlement to education, skills acquisition, and self-fulfillment. Ensuring education for young girls becomes a necessity for achieving national progress. Educating females within families is pivotal to overall development and community well-being. A nation's human capital is determined by the potential of its citizens to be healthier, better educated, empowered, and productive. Hence, prioritizing the education of half the population is crucial.¹¹

Poverty hampers access to fundamental services like healthcare. When girls are deprived of education, they lack crucial information regarding modern health facilities, nutrition, and a balanced diet. These limitations lead to malnutrition, stunted growth, and high mortality rates during childbirth. Elevating the nutritional awareness and status of girls and women would yield tangible health benefits for Nigerian children. A staggering 41% of children under 5 are stunted, 23% are underweight, and 14% are wasted. More concerning is the reported stunting level exceeding 53% in certain rural areas, particularly in the Northeast and Northwest regions. This situation predisposes these children to poor health, limited cognitive abilities, and low academic performance, all of which hinder future job prospects and earning potential.¹²

Poverty significantly contributes to the persistence of child marriage. In economically disadvantaged regions, families lack resources for viable alternatives like education, making child marriage appear as a means of securing their daughters' futures.

¹¹<https://africacheck.org/sites/default/files/July-info-graphic.pdf> Accessed 9 August 2023.

¹² Ibid

However, young marriages often lead to higher chances of divorce, ongoing poverty, and perpetuating the cycle of deprivation. The Northeast and Northwest areas face extreme poverty rates, averaging above 50% and sometimes exceeding 70%, while Southern States experience significantly lower poverty rates, generally under 40%. Many parents opt for child marriage out of economic necessity, yet this practice only reinforces the cycle of generational poverty. Investing in just one additional year of primary, secondary, or tertiary education for a girl can potentially raise her future wages by approximately 11.7%.¹³ Child marriage undermines a girl's access to education, jeopardizes her well-being, and truncates her personal growth and development. Its negative repercussions extend to her community, as she often remains unskilled and unproductive, frequently resorting to "talla" (hawking) in rural areas. The practice of girls hawking places underage girls at high risk of pedophilia. Moreover, it reinforces the notion that adolescent girls are mature enough for marriage, all while excluding them from educational opportunities, whether secular or Quranic.¹⁴

On average, merely 70% of girls burdened with 28 or more hours of household chores manage to attend school. However, when this chore load is reduced to fewer than 14 hours, as many as 90% can attend school.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Education for the girl child in northern Nigeria.

<https://africacheck.org/sites/default/files/July-info-graphic.pdf>. Accessed 9

August 2023. p 2.

This indicates a strong correlation between heavy workloads and dropping out, although a more thorough analysis is required to establish this as a definite pattern and determine the threshold at which this occurs. In rural settings, women contribute to 60-70% of the rural workforce, often working longer hours than men due to the combination of domestic and productive tasks. Despite this, women held fewer than 30% of all positions in the public sector as of 2012, with a mere 17% occupying senior roles. By December 2014, only 7 out of 109 Senators and 19 out of 360 Members of the House of Representatives were female. Furthermore, a scant 7.2% of women owned the land they cultivated, limiting their access to credit and constraining entrepreneurial and business endeavors.¹⁶

The survival rate of children born to mothers is 50% higher and these educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school.¹⁷

Each year of child marriage before the age of 18 can result in a decline of up to 6 percentage points in the likelihood of literacy and secondary school completion for girls. Although the impact varies in different instances, it often holds statistical significance. According to household survey data from Nigeria,

¹⁶Education for the girl child in northern Nigeria. <https://africacheck.org/sites/default/files/July-info-graphic.pdf>. Accessed 9 August 2023. p 2.

¹⁷Bado AR, Sathiya Susuman A. Women's Education and Health Inequalities in Under-Five Mortality in Selected Sub-Saharan African Countries, 1990-2015 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4956109/> Accessed 9 August 2023.

parents attribute 15% - 20% of adolescent girls' school dropouts to child marriage.¹⁸

Completing primary education among women in low and lower-middle-income countries would result in a 15% decrease in the under-5 mortality rate. Moreover, if women were to finish secondary education, this rate would plummet by 49%, translating to approximately 2.8 million lives saved annually. Enabling all women to attain primary education would lead to a significant reduction of 66% in maternal deaths, safeguarding 189,000 lives each year.¹⁹

In regions such as sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, ensuring the completion of primary school by all girls would result in a 14% decline in the number of girls marrying by age 15. With the attainment of secondary education, this number would further diminish, with a remarkable 64% fewer girls entering into early marriages. Maternal health risks are of particular concern, especially considering that girls under the age of 15 face a risk of death in pregnancy and childbirth that is five times higher than that for women aged 18 and above.²⁰

Education holds a paramount role in Sharia, as evidenced by the very first Quranic verse revealed to Prophet Mohammed (SAW), commanding him to "Read, in the name of our Lord, who created you."²¹ The Prophet himself emphasized the importance of knowledge, urging Muslims to "seek knowledge, even if it takes you to China." These teachings from both the Quran and Hadith transcend gender, underscoring the directive

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Quran 96:1-5

to pursue knowledge, placing it in higher priority than marriage, which is only permitted under specific conditions²². In northern Nigeria, educating a girl child not only reduces inequality but also enhances women's labor force participation rates and earnings. Education empowers women, fostering self-awareness that contributes to peace-building, stability, reconciliation, and security. This awareness further fosters cohesion and harmony within communities and society at large.²³

Islam unequivocally opposes pedophilia and upholds education.²⁴ However, there seems to be a conspicuous silence surrounding these principles. The phenomenon of 'talla' sees rural communities sending young girls to urban areas for hawking. The practice of marrying and divorcing repeatedly becomes a survival strategy for these girls, despite the negative consequences for them, their children, and the resulting disruptions in health and child welfare. Few child brides in rural areas can sustain education while juggling the roles of wife, mother, and student without external support and access to modern amenities, which are often lacking in poorer communities. This lack of literacy perpetuates ignorance about the value of education, thus continuing a cycle of unawareness. Child marriage has unfortunately deprived the North of much-needed professionals, including female teachers, doctors, and nurses.²⁵

²²“He is Allah, and there is no God beside Him” (Surah al-Hashr, Ch.59: V23), (Al-Hakam, Issue 234)

²³Supra note 12

²⁴Religacion.VOL 4 No. 17, Julio 2019, pp. 94-99.

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/8274088.pdf> Accessed 9th August 2023.

²⁵Supra note 12

One of the key benefits of educating girl children lies in its capacity to reduce poverty and generate intergenerational educational advantages. It bolsters productivity and earnings, enhancing economic competitiveness. Remarkably, an educated girl is well-informed about medical and self-care practices, leading to improved health and nutrition, reduced rates of infant, child, and maternal mortality, and protection against sexually transmitted infections.²⁶

2.02 THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE NORTHERN GIRL CHILD IN NIGERIA'S EDUCATIONAL POLICY

The girl child in the northern region of Nigeria faces significant barriers to education, including poverty, early marriage, and cultural attitudes. Male education is often prioritized over female education. Educating the northern girl child is essential to the nation's educational policy and will contribute to the nation's growth and development.²⁷ The girl child in the North is often marginalized and denied access to education. Educating the girl child will promote gender equality, improve the nation's economy, and break the cycle of poverty by creating ample employment opportunities. Educating the northern girl child will allow them to cater for themselves and their families. Prioritizing northern girl child education is essential in creating awareness among parents and the community about the importance of educating their girl child.²⁸ Educating women stimulates economic development in Northern Nigeria and

²⁶ Supra note 12

²⁷ Usaina Ishaq Izam, "Impact Of A Girl Child Education In Northern Nigeria" [2023] <https://opinionnigeria.com> Accessed 9 August 2023.

²⁸ Ibid

reduces dependence on aid and foreign investment. Educated girls are less likely to be married off at a young age, which can negatively affect their health, education, and overall well-being. Investing in girl-child education would drastically reduce the prevalence of child marriage in Northern Nigeria.²⁹

The Constitution of Nigeria in 1999 stipulated that primary education is free and compulsory³⁰. However, about 10.5 million children aged 5-14 years are not in school. Only 61% of 6-11 year-olds regularly attend primary school, and only 35.6% of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the northern region of Nigeria, the situation is even worse, with a net attendance rate of 53 %. Re-enrolling out-of-school children poses a huge challenge. States in the northeast and northwest have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7% and 47.3%, respectively. Indicating that over half of the girls are not in school. The lack of education in northern Nigeria is caused by various factors, including economic barriers and socio-cultural norms that discourage formal education, particularly for girls. Providing education in rural areas and the impact of insurgency in the northeast are significant challenges. In northeastern and north-western states, 29% and 35% of Muslim children, respectively, receive Qur'anic education, which does not include basic skills like literacy and numeracy.³¹ The government considers children attending such schools to be officially out of school. In three conflict-affected states in north-eastern Nigeria, 2.8 million children need education-in-emergency support. In these States, at least 802

²⁹Ibid

³⁰ 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Section 18.(AUDJ, Vol. 17, No. 1/2021, pp. 60-85).

³¹Supra note 28

schools remain closed and 497 classrooms are listed as destroyed, with another 1,392 damaged but repairable.³² For almost a decade, education for girls in Northern Nigeria has been plagued by attacks from Boko Haram. It is a sad reality for a region with the country's highest rate of out-of-school children, with less than 50% of girls in school. Though attacks have involved the abduction of both school boys and girls, there has been a higher reported number of abductions of school-aged girls and women.³³

The abduction of over 300 school girls by bandits from a boarding school in Jangebe, Zamfara State, Nigeria, has grave consequences for girls' education in a region already plagued by high gender disparities in access to education. Girls' education in the Northern region of Nigeria is still at risk due to the frequency of abductions and violence against women and girls. Although girls have been reported to have been released, the threat remains potent.³⁴ The insecurity in the region and the violence against schoolgirls have led to parents' fear of sending their girls back to school and the girls' fear of returning to school. Girls' learning is hindered by the mental and psychological stress caused by violent events. This is especially true when girls have little or no access to psychological support or a trauma-informed learning environment.³⁵

³²Supra note 28

³³Odinaka Chukwu, "New Dangers to Girls' Education in Northern Nigeria" (Committing to change: Girls EiE from Charlevoix to COVID-19, 1 April 2021). <https://incc.org> Accessed 9 August 2023.

³⁴Ibid

³⁵Ibid

The absence of a secure learning environment leads to a series of negative outcomes for girls' future lives, such as loss of education, early marriage, early pregnancy, increased rates of sexual violence, and the stigma attached to these attacks. Girls who drop out of school find it difficult to return to the system, and they are often forced to stay home and do domestic chores, which puts them at greater risk of domestic violence. When girls have access to education, they avoid early pregnancy and marriage and can continue their education to higher levels. This provides girls with the chance to reach their highest potential and become self-reliant.³⁶

2.03 THE USE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY IN INVESTIGATING THE GIRLCHILD'S INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Social constructivism is based on individual perception, and it postulates that learners construct knowledge from experience. Learning is social, and it connects all aspects of an individual. Social constructivism posits that social interaction and individual actions are connected. Learners are allowed to construct their knowledge because that's how the mind works.³⁷ When constructing new knowledge, thinking, accepted wisdom, and judgment are involved in the process. To understand new ideas, one must connect them to existing conceptions. Knowledge has to be modified and evaluated by others rather than absorbing it. Education is not limited to reading and writing. It is about enlightenment and awareness. Teachers use constructivist principles to promote student self-sufficiency and inventiveness; by using constructivist principles,

³⁶Ibid

³⁷Kapur Radhika, "The Significance of Social Constructivism in Education" (2018). <https://researchgate.net>

students are encouraged to become more resourceful.³⁸ To develop their whole way of life, students need opportunities and reinforcement. They must bring this to analyze their academic learning. Teachers who use the constructivist approach use cognitive terminology to structure assignments and duties. Denying girls their right to education is unacceptable. Popular culture and knowledge connect to bring insight, instruction, and augmentation to life.³⁹ Knowledge is not only acquired through academics or extra-curricular activities. The social construction of knowledge also happens through involvement in other life routines. Teachers ask students about their understanding of concepts before teaching them more information. Girls who are educated can think critically and construct their knowledge, which is the basis of social constructivism.⁴⁰

Constructivism accepts that every child is unique. Children can construct their understanding of the world through their experiences, trial, and error, and by generating rules and ideas. Constructivism allows girls to follow their instincts and create their own knowledge and learning strategies.⁴¹ According to Lev Vygotsky, he revealed that a child often accomplishes new tasks under the close supervision of an adult. This does not imply that the adult is teaching the child how to solve problems, but the learning experience improves when the adult engages with the child. This helps the child refine their thinking and perform effectively. Social constructivism emphasizes that

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Sarah Lipoff, "Constructivism and the Developing Child" (2011).
<https://funderstanding.com> Accessed 9 August 2023.

children learn through interaction with others and experiences outside themselves. The mainstream classroom is not a comfortable environment to support constructivism in education.⁴²

Social constructivism allows teachers to encourage students to work in teams and engage in group discussions with both teachers and peers.

Constructivist teachers cultivate students' expected inquisitiveness through frequent use of the learning cycle model. This encourages students to be outspoken by asking questions and enhancing their learning. Social constructivist perspectives focus on how community and individual processes are interdependent in constructing knowledge and awareness.⁴³

Social constructivist viewpoints consider learning as a self-motivated process, where students draw on past knowledge, build on assumptions, and engage in cognitive conflict. Teachers can create curriculum and instructional methodologies that go beyond rote knowledge and lead to deeper, long-lasting knowledge. The social construction of knowledge occurs when individuals enroll in educational institutions and engage in group discussions or teamwork.⁴⁴ As a result, individuals gain the necessary understanding and knowledge of various concepts, methods, experiences, and insights required to live efficiently. Social constructivism theory includes elements that encourage learners to acquire education and knowledge. Individuals learn to connect their values, norms, attitudes, behaviors, actions, and emotions.⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Ibid

⁴⁵Ibid

3.00 THE CHALLENGES OF THE NORTHERN GIRLCHILD IN ACCESSING EDUCATION

The introduction of Western education to Northern Nigeria contrasts with northern religio-cultural values. Due to their religious beliefs, northerners are against co-education. Hence, they discourage girls from attending school to avoid interacting with boys. Northern Nigeria is predominantly a Muslim state where religious beliefs are highly valued. In Nigeria, especially in the Muslim-dominated Northern States; girl child education is lagging despite policies made to ensure equitable access to education.⁴⁶ The reason for the girl child's limited access to education in the area of study is due to poverty, lack of government policies, parental preference to educate the male child, and religio-cultural factors. Traditionally, in the Northern region, women are often confined to the roles of childbearing and nurturing, with the pursuit of higher education deemed unnecessary. Conversely, some parents in the Northern part hold the belief that higher education is exclusively meant for boys, often neglecting their female counterparts. There's a prevailing notion that the pursuit of advanced education is reserved solely for boys, as they are not constrained by the urgency of marriage that girls face. Boys can delay marriage without losing social standing, while girls risk social rejection and loss of dignity.⁴⁷ Consequently, parents tend to prioritize marrying off their daughters shortly after they reach puberty. The prevalent

⁴⁶Nasidi, Nadir & Wali, Rukayya, "The Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Ungogo Local Government Area of Kano State in Nigeria on 1999-2019"(2023). *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (JHASS)*. 5. 27-36. 10.36079/lamintang.jhass-0501.508.

⁴⁷Ibrahim Kawuley Mikail, Asma 'u Sani Maikudi & Babayo Sule, "The Challenges of Girlchild Education in Northern Nigeria and the Way Forward. Chapter 15; pp 317-326. <https://www.researchgate.net/> Accessed 13 August 2023.

Purdah marital practices in many Northern households further hinder girls from accessing basic education and beyond. These parents sometimes undermine the value of Western education due to cultural norms. These constraints have severely hindered the educational advancement of many female children.⁴⁸

Furthermore, misinterpretations of religious teachings also contribute to the challenges faced by Northern girls in accessing education. Many Northern parents associate their reluctance to send their daughters for higher education with religious convictions, particularly within Islam. They mistakenly believe that Islam discourages the education of girls beyond a certain level. This misinterpretation stems from the belief that raising two to three daughters with quality education, moral character, and good values guarantees parents entry into heaven in the afterlife, as indicated by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him).⁴⁹

In Nigeria, the educational sector has faced significant challenges, especially during civilian rule (1999 to the present). Despite UNESCO's recommendation that member states allocate a minimum of 26% of their budgets to education, Nigeria has fallen short of this standard, allocating just 11.2%, 8.3%, 7.0%, and 5.9% for education in the years 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

respectively.⁵⁰ The lowest point was in 2003 when a mere 1.8% was dedicated to education.⁵¹

This insufficient funding has failed the 6-3-3-4 education system in Nigeria, a program that demands significant financial resources. This system necessitates substantial manpower in the form of trained and recruited teachers, as well as the establishment of workshops, technical and vocational centers, functional laboratories, libraries, and counseling services – all of which require substantial budgetary allocations. The lack of educational materials further compounds the situation, making the teaching method more challenging.⁵²

Furthermore, according to UNICEF, the denial of complete educational rights for girls impacts society as a whole. A society cannot be certain of its future when the education rights of the girl child are withheld.⁵³ Conversely, Ojimadu contends that the essential rights of a girl can solely be cultivated through a robust education, recognizing that all her other socio-political and economic rights rely on ensuring her access to education.

⁵⁰ South East Political Science Review, Vol.1 No.1, 2017 305.
<https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SEJPS/article/download/765/742/1497> Accessed 13th August, 2023.

⁵¹ Ahmad, A., Shehu, S. and Mahmoud, Z., “Factors Affecting Development of Education in Nigeria”. (2019). In: T. Umar, ed., Multifarious Issues in Nigeria Today: Multidisciplinary Approaches, 1st ed. Akure: Science and Education Development Inst., Nigeria, pp.70-80.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ UNICEF, “The Relevance of the Female Teacher and Other Professionals as Models of the Girl Child Education on Enrollment; Retention in the Northern States”(2005). A Paper Presented at the workshop on Gender Disparities held by UNICEF, Kano: 15-17

Educating the girl child diminishes societal problems such as unemployment, the erosion of family values, the spread of diseases, and insecurity.⁵⁴ Moreover, Oresile contends that a direct correlation exists between girls' education and the sustainable development of a nation. He believes this connection is realized through their roles as prospective mothers and peace educators, as they instill in their children social norms, values, and ethics.⁵⁵ It has also been argued that education equips the girl child to effectively embrace various societal roles, as she gains both intellectual and physical abilities to shape her mindset and make significant contributions to her community.⁵⁶

Similarly, the attainment of education by the girl child establishes the groundwork for socio-economic advancements within nations.⁵⁷ The Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs also asserts that educational achievement undoubtedly stands as the most essential prerequisite for empowering girls across all aspects of life. This report emphasizes that the absence of quality education would render girls incapable of engaging in governance and being adequately represented.⁵⁸ Extensive empirical evidence also indicates that educating the girl child lowers child mortality rates by promoting knowledge and

⁵⁴Birdshall, N., Levine, R. & Ibrahim, A., "Towards Universal Primary Education: Investments, Incentives and Institutions" (2015). *European Journal of Education*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 337-349.

⁵⁵Oresile, G.B., "Women Education and National Development" (1998). *Journal of Women in College of Education*, vol. 2, no. 1.

⁵⁶Maimuna, K., "Girl Child Education in Northern Nigeria. Zahra Nanono Girls' College, Dorayi

⁵⁷Stephen, M., "Poverty, Population and Environment: World Development Report" (1992). Washington.C: The World Bank.

⁵⁸The Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs, "Nigerian Gender Statistics Digest" (2006). Abuja FMWA.

awareness that contribute to healthier and more hygienic maternity practices.

It is therefore evident that a direct correlation exists between girl child education and societal progress. It is equally evident that the refusal to provide girl child education has negative consequences for the girls themselves, and this, in turn, sets the stage for various societal issues. Despite these endeavors, the girl child continues to face challenging socio-economic and political circumstances, largely influenced by numerous factors that contribute to the lagging state of her education, particularly in Northern Nigeria. While the colonial era did witness substantial educational endeavors in Northern Nigeria, notably during the 1920s and 1940s, boys' education was given more prominence. It was not until the 1930s that girl child education began to gain recognition, particularly in the Northern Province. Consequently, the initial hindrance to girl child education in Northern Nigeria stemmed from the disparity in providing equal educational opportunities irrespective of gender.⁵⁹

Despite the creation of schools, girls' education suffered from insufficient funding. Kurfi and Dauda further suggest that the challenge of girl child education in the Northern region primarily arose from the British colonial government's introduction of Western education. This approach placed importance on educating both girls and boys within the same institutions.⁶⁰ Beyond the religious dimension mentioned, Muslims in Northern Nigeria found the Western education

⁵⁹Gbadegesin, "The Assessment of Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria"(2018). Afrika: The University of Leeds.

⁶⁰Kurfi, M.H., "Girl child Education on the Brink:moving towards Affirmative Action Policy"(2015).

Kano Journal of Educational Studies, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 277-290.

system, particularly for girls, culturally unfamiliar and potentially problematic. They believed it could lead to unfavorable outcomes. Consequently, this situation acted as an obstacle to the seamless advancement and adoption of girl child education in Northern Nigeria.⁶¹ The challenge of girl child education can be traced back to the doubts held by the current Northern States in Nigeria regarding Western education. This educational system was introduced by colonialists and Christian missionaries, emphasizing the inclusion of both genders. It is important to note that while the rejection of Western education by Northern Muslims initially occurred upon its introduction, it was later embraced by the majority. Despite recent Boko Haram insurgencies raising doubts about the legitimacy of Western education, mainstream Muslims have not embraced their unfounded ideology.⁶²

4.0 EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

Educational policies significantly influence the accessibility and quality of education for girls. These policies can have either positive or negative effects. Positive policies encompass various aspects such as ensuring access to basic education, promoting gender equality, conducting advocacy and sensitization efforts, establishing free and compulsory basic education, fostering safe learning environments, allocating a gender-sensitive education budget, facilitating training and employment opportunities for female teachers in rural schools, adhering to child-friendly school principles, and offering incentives to girls, among other

⁶¹Dauda A., "Issues in Educational Administration"(2008). Kano: Gidan Dabino Publishers.

⁶²Okpani, "Boosting Girl Child Education in the North". Daily Trust Newspaper. (Thursday, Sept 4, 2003).

measures. In Nigeria, particularly in the northern region, there exists a disparity in enrollment rates between girls and boys within the formal basic education system. In contrast, some girls opt for enrollment in an extensive network of non-formal Islamic education centers found in both urban and rural settings.⁶³

Interestingly, in these centers, girls' enrollment rates occasionally surpass those of boys. This trend is observable, for instance, in Islamiya schools situated in areas such as Kano, Borno, and Sokoto. Hence, it becomes imperative to enhance support for the Non-Formal Sector as an alternative avenue for ensuring quality education and promoting gender equality. However, the effectiveness of this policy can be impeded by various obstacles, including a dearth of political dedication, inadequate planning, and management, the presence of gender-insensitive instructional materials, a curriculum lacking gender consideration, school infrastructure that is not conducive to girls, imbalanced ratios of female-to-male teachers, prejudiced attitudes against girls, instances of sexual harassment, economic hardships, cultural influences, and misconstrued interpretations of religious teachings.⁶⁴

Moreover, girls exhibit a lower retention rate in basic education compared to boys, evident through a 17% dropout rate for girls at the primary school level, slightly higher than the 15.8% rate for boys. Even when girls and boys commence schooling simultaneously, girls often discontinue before completion. This trend is exemplified by the national attendance statistics, indicating primary school attendance rates of 59% for boys and

⁶³Federal Ministry Of Education, "National Policy On Gender In Basic Education" (Jan 2006). [HTTPS://planipolisi.iiep.unesco.org](https://planipolisi.iiep.unesco.org) Accessed 9 August 2023.

⁶⁴Supra note 38

54% for girls. While drop-out rates are relatively subdued in grades 1 to 5, they surge upon reaching primary 6, highlighting a significant number of students unable to proceed to junior secondary school. In this context, various factors contribute to the elevated drop-out rates among girls. These include early marriages, poverty, engagement of girls in child labor, the opportunity cost associated with education, misconceptions, and restrictions stemming from religious beliefs, the marginalized status of women, challenges related to distance and school accessibility, instances of teenage pregnancy, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, as well as sexual abuse and exploitation.⁶⁵

Moreover, policies, no matter how well-crafted, are susceptible to faltering without sufficient funding to back their execution. The pillars of impact and sustainability hinge on the involvement and commitment of all crucial stakeholders throughout the policy's lifecycle, encompassing its design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It remains imperative to secure consistent financial support from government entities at various tiers for the education sector. This entails ensuring that the allocation for primary education aligns with the intended targets outlined in the country's medium-term expenditure framework and is promptly disbursed. Education stands as a costly social endeavor, necessitating sufficient financial allocations from various governmental levels, as well as other contributors such as international development partners, the private sector, civil society, and individuals. Consequently, the responsibility for funding and executing initiatives aimed at rectifying gender disparities in education should not rest solely on the government's shoulders. Additionally, fostering fiscal

⁶⁵Federal Ministry Of Education, "National Policy On Gender In Basic Education" (Jan 2006). [HTTPS://planipolisi.iiep.unesco.org](https://planipolisi.iiep.unesco.org) Accessed 9 August 2023.

prudence through a robust budgetary framework, coupled with community involvement, emerges as a crucial aspect to uphold. Sustaining the success of any policy hinges on continuity.⁶⁶ Therefore, establishing a robust mechanism for upholding the gender and basic education program's sustainability remains imperative. This foundation should be rooted in the meaningful participation of all pivotal stakeholders, as well as community engagement. Fostering sustainability necessitates viewing accountability, transparency, and responsible financial management as catalysts. In the past, commendable policies suffered from inadequate implementation due to the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Furthermore, insufficient allocation of both financial and human resources for monitoring and evaluation has been a recurring challenge. The responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the execution of the Gender and Basic Education Policy lies with the Federal Ministry of Education.⁶⁷

5.00 IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

Educational policies wield a significant influence on girls' education accessibility and quality, with both positive and negative effects. Positive policies encompass ensuring basic education access, advocating gender equality, safe learning environments, gender-sensitive budgets, and incentives for girls. Northern Nigeria sees a gender enrollment gap in formal education, while some girls opt for non-formal Islamic centers, where enrollment may exceed boys'. Strengthening the Non-Formal Sector as an alternative for quality education and gender equality is crucial. Challenges include political commitment,

⁶⁶Ibid

⁶⁷Ibid

planning, gender-insensitive materials, biased curriculum, unsuitable infrastructure, teacher imbalances, prejudice, harassment, economic issues, cultural influences, and misinterpretation of religious teachings.⁶⁸

Girls have a higher dropout rate in basic education, with a 17% primary school dropout rate for girls compared to 15.8% for boys. Despite starting together, girls tend to discontinue schooling earlier. National attendance stats show 59% primary school attendance for boys and 54% for girls. Dropouts increase in primary 6, indicating challenges moving to junior secondary school. Factors contributing to girls' dropout include early marriages, poverty, child labor, opportunity cost, religious misconceptions, women's marginalized status, distance challenges, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and abuse.

Policy effectiveness requires funding and commitment from stakeholders in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages. Consistent financial support from the government, aligned with expenditure plans, is vital for education. Education's cost demands contributions from partners, the private sector, civil society, and individuals, not just the government. Fiscal prudence and community involvement ensure sustainability. Policy success hinges on continuity.⁶⁹

To ensure the sustainability of the gender and basic education program, a robust mechanism must be established, involving key stakeholders and community engagement. Sustainability relies on accountability, transparency, and responsible financial management. Past policies failed due to poor monitoring and evaluation systems and inadequate resource allocation. The

⁶⁸Ibid

⁶⁹Ibid

Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the Gender and Basic Education Policy's execution.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the article presents viable remedies to address the issue of gender inequality in education. To enhance girls' enrollment in schools, the Nigerian Federal Government suggests employing an advocacy and sensitization approach. This involves influential organizations conducting campaigns to raise awareness about the significance of educating girl children, and leveraging female role models. Moreover, the federal government should reiterate its commitment to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy, guaranteeing free and compulsory basic education for all youngsters. Alongside this reiteration, there's a need to establish child-friendly school infrastructure that facilitates effective teaching and learning.⁷¹ Likewise, it is essential to introduce incentives for both female educators and students. Regarding teachers, the Nigerian Federal Government urges state administrations to offer motivating rewards to female educators, encouraging their deployment in rural educational institutions. For female students, enhancing their involvement in basic education entails facilitating improved access, supplying complimentary uniforms and books, providing sanitary pads for adolescent girls who have to travel over 5 kilometers to school, and furnishing high-quality boarding facilities free of charge. The Nigerian Federal Government should also ensure that upcoming editions and texts slated for use in schools undergo gender-sensitive review. These new materials should portray accomplished women in positive and empowering portrayals.⁷²

⁷⁰Ibid

⁷¹Ibid

⁷²Ibid

6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, the examination of the involvement of girls in educational policy in Nigeria, particularly in Northern Nigeria, has revealed a range of challenges and opportunities. Persistent disparities in educational achievement between genders underscore entrenched socio-cultural norms and systemic problems. Amidst these challenges, signs of positive transformation emerge. Diverse educational initiatives and policies have been introduced to tackle gender disparities. Yet, their success hinges on collaborative endeavors involving government entities, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. The trajectory of girls' education in Northern Nigeria relies on concerted efforts, policy adjustments, and a cultural transformation towards gender equality.

This study lays the groundwork for ongoing discussions, the reassessment of policies, and strategic planning aimed at providing deserving education to girls. This contributes to the overall advancement and development of the region. Policymakers, educators, community leaders, and parents each have significant roles in shaping the educational landscape for girls. Collaborative efforts involving these stakeholders in decision-making processes can yield more effective and sustainable solutions. Recognizing the transformative impact, the empowerment of girls through education extends beyond individual benefits, fostering progress and well-being within society at large.

This article issues a call to action, urging policymakers, educators, and communities to unite in a collective effort toward a future where every girl not only has the opportunity to thrive but can also contribute significantly to the prosperity of her community and nation.

The provision of adequate funding for educational infrastructure, scholarships, and resources tailored to the specific needs of girls emerges as a critical factor in significantly enhancing their access to quality education. Complementary economic empowerment programs for families can alleviate financial pressures that often lead to the premature withdrawal of girls from school.

Furthermore, the implementation of digital learning tools, online resources, and distance education programs stands as a potential solution to overcome geographical constraints, providing educational opportunities in remote areas. However, it is imperative to ensure that these technologies are not only accessible but also inclusive, actively working to bridge the digital divide that may otherwise worsen existing inequalities.

Achieving gender-inclusive education in Northern Nigeria necessitates a thorough and adaptable strategy. This undertaking entails the transformation of cultural narratives, the promotion of community engagement, the effective utilization of technology, and a steadfast dedication to continual enhancement. By tackling the fundamental causes of gender-based disparities and actively engaging all stakeholders, we can aspire to a future wherein every girl in Northern Nigeria enjoys equitable access to quality education. This, in turn, unlocks her full potential and becomes a catalyst for the collective progress of the region.

To address the challenges, particularly in Nigeria's northern region, various recommendations have been put forth by the federal government, pertinent agencies, and stakeholders.

1. The Nigerian Federal Government encourages State Governments to devise innovative approaches for an extensive initiative aimed at recruiting and training proficient women from within their respective states to serve as teachers, especially in remote areas where deploying teachers is challenging. Upon completing their teacher training, these graduates will be required to dedicate at least one year to teaching in rural schools.⁷³ As a comprehensive, long-term strategy, both the Nigerian Federal Government and State Governments will collaborate to enhance the transportation infrastructure and essential services in rural locales, rendering them more appealing for female educators. This encompasses the construction of high-quality teacher residences and ensuring access to safe water, sanitation, and healthcare facilities.⁷⁴
2. Additionally, incentives like expedited promotions for rural educators, increased salaries or stipends, hardship allowances, transport support, and secure, well-constructed housing should be encouraged to attract and retain teachers in rural areas. In conjunction with International Development Agencies and Civil Society, the Nigerian Federal Government will undertake a substantial initiative to enhance the capabilities of personnel across the Basic Education Sector (both at the federal level, including UBE, and the state level) regarding gender and basic education. The approach will encompass workshops tailored for specific groups, briefings to sensitize policymakers, formulation of

⁷³Ibid

⁷⁴Ibid

- gender-focused training materials for the sector, and integration of gender-related topics into both Teacher Training and In-Service Training Curricula.⁷⁵
3. Recognizing that gender-sensitive policies unsupported by appropriate budget allocation tend to falter, the Nigerian Federal Government is committed to designating a minimum of 2% from the Basic Education Budget for endeavors aimed at bolstering girls' educational access, particularly in schools with pronounced gender disparities. Similarly, the government urges State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) and State Ministries of Education to allocate a substantial portion of their education budget to initiatives that promote girls' access to basic education and to the formulation of pertinent supportive policies.⁷⁶
 4. It is important to incorporate the concept of Education Sector Planning (ESP), which underscores the need to plan and prioritize educational provisions, into the process of planning and budgeting for basic education.⁷⁷
 5. The Nigerian Federal Government urges State governments to introduce incentives for female teachers to enhance their deployment in rural schools. Strategies aimed at boosting girls' participation in basic education will involve implementing scholarship programs, providing complimentary uniforms and textbooks,

⁷⁵Ibid

⁷⁶Ibid

⁷⁷Odinaka Chukwu, "New Dangers to Girls' Education in Northern Nigeria"(Committing to change: Girls EiE from Charlevoix to COVID-19, 1 April 2021). <https://inee.org> Accessed 9 August 2023.

distributing sanitary pads to adolescent girls who must travel over 5 kilometers to school, and establishing free, high-quality boarding facilities for girls.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the Nigerian Federal Government mandates that all new editions and texts slated for school use undergo a review process for gender sensitivity. Collaboratively, the Federal Ministry and State Governments will devise mechanisms for this evaluation. The federal government also advocates for the creation of educational materials such as books, films, and media content that portray accomplished women in a positive light. This initiative aligns with the need for curriculum reform that addresses strategic gender requirements.⁷⁹

6. Similarly, the government must invest in comprehensive and robust security measures for schools, safeguarding both children and education personnel from potential attacks during their commute to and from school. It is equally important to establish a nationwide initiative aimed at consistent data reporting concerning the abuse, abduction, and exploitation of girls. This necessity arises from instances where media coverage of schoolgirls' abductions has displayed irregularities in accurately portraying the number of victims and survivors.⁸⁰
7. In scenarios where security concerns lead to the closure of certain schools, the government should take proactive steps to ensure that alternative forms of education are available for girls, guaranteeing their continued access to

⁷⁸Ibid

⁷⁹Ibid

⁸⁰Supra note 51

learning opportunities. This could involve the establishment of peer-supported learning networks, along with the provision of remote learning materials facilitated by community-based education providers.⁸¹

8. In the meantime, it is crucial to extend psychosocial support and establish an environment centered around addressing trauma for girls situated in crisis contexts. This can manifest in various ways, such as garnering support from parents and the community to ensure that girls are not overwhelmed by domestic responsibilities at home, allowing them ample time to focus on their studies. Additionally, community educators, parents, and teachers need to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to foster the well-being of girls, shield them from violence, and cultivate a nurturing learning environment.⁸² Consequently, there's an imperative to strengthen gender-related proficiency among all key stakeholders within the realm of basic education at the state level. This approach amplifies the potential for effective execution of the proposed gender-focused basic education policy. A significant facet of policy implementation lies in sensitizing communities about pertinent matters in basic education through a gender-sensitive lens.⁸³ Taking lessons from challenges faced during previous education policy implementations in Nigeria, it's strongly advised to allocate resources for a

⁸¹ Supra note 51

⁸² Supra note 51

⁸³ Supra note 51

robust implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the gender and basic education policy.⁸⁴

9. The government ought to establish comprehensive policy frameworks that delineate roles, and responsibilities, and allocate sufficient resources while fostering collaboration among relevant Ministries, Departments, and agencies. These encompass women and children, justice, education, health, water, social protection, community development, agriculture, and security.⁸⁵ To enhance the appeal of education, schools should
10. cultivate an environment conducive to networking, experience sharing, and the acquisition of life skills, trades, leadership, and entrepreneurship, alongside education on nutrition, hygiene, and artistic expression, interwoven with religious teachings.⁸⁶ This effort would entail setting up School Based Management Committees for meticulous oversight, enhanced planning, and community engagement. It would ensure the presence of female educators, role models, and mentors, showcasing the merits of educating girls and dispelling misconceptions.⁸⁷ For families educating girl-children, financial support through scholarships and conditional cash transfers should be allocated. This assists in addressing the opportunity costs of reduced income due to the girl's prolonged education, postponing marriage until she reaches maturity. Creating income-generation avenues for married adolescents prioritizes structured

⁸⁴ Supra note 51

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ Ibid

skills and vocations, enabling them to develop competencies and contribute to household income.⁸⁸

11. Compulsory birth and marriage registration, coupled with protective clauses in marriage contracts, can discourage reckless divorce while allowing for arbitration and sanctions for breaches.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Ibid

⁸⁹Ibid