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The Role of Female Child Education in Re-Defining Gender Inequality in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The study focuses on the role of female child education in re-defining gender inequality in Nigeria. Education as the key enables the female child the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills for development purposes. One of the objectives of the study is to uncover the root causes of inequality in education as it affects the development of girl child capability. Related concept on a girl child education and gender inequality are reviewed. The study is anchored on the sociology of inequality as postulated by Ashley Crossman. The methodology adopted for the study is survey research method using questionnaire and online interview as instrument for data collection. The population for the study is 5,459,000. The sample size is 400 according to Taro Yamane's formula. The data gathered for the study is presented in tables, simple percentages and analyzed based on the sequence of the questionnaire. Findings from the study revealed that cases of inequality in education against girl child exist and the root cause is based on the socio-economic factors such as patriarchy, preference given to male children and traditional belief. Other findings in the aspect of challenges centre on poverty, poor living standard as well as inconsistent government policies and implementation. The study therefore recommends for affirmative action for effective realization of a girl child development on the bases of inclusiveness and representation, careers of their choices as well as safety in school environment.

Key words: Education, Female child, Inequality, Gender equality, Child labour

Introduction

Background of Study

Education plays a vital role for a total development and improvement in the life of every girl child (Quentin 2020). Educating a girl child is tantamount to educating a nation. Education as a key enables a female child the opportunity to obtain knowledge and skills needed to advance socially, physically and economically to enhance in status, increased welfare as well as exhibits her potentials to act on their own without being influenced nor guided to perform a task.

Female child education has been widely viewed from varying angles by different scholars and organizations. Every female child who is privileged to receive or obtained western education is less likely to accept the offer of an early engagement and marriage. Education acquired through learning allows a female child the opportunity to boost her inherent ability which may enable her to lead a healthy and productive life, earn a higher income and contributes to decision making thereby helping to build an authentic future and contributes meaningfully to progressive family lives. Girl child education has the capability of strengthening the economy of a nation and eradicating gender inequality and biasness.

United Nations conceptualization of gender discrimination was unveiled firstly at the General Assembly in 1993 through the acceptance of the Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and girls. As captured by the World Health Organization (W.H.O), the United Nation (UN) in 1993 postulated that the term Gender discrimination means " any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purposes of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status on the basis of equality of men and women or of human rights."

As used variously by scholars, the term gender discrimination would be used interchangeably with gender inequality in this study. The United Nation's has made a tremendous advancement on gender equality through agreements such as the Beijing declaration and platform for action and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) and girls in all areas and promoting women and girls equal rights.

Gender inequality was viewed in the early 1970s as a severe societal menace that attracted global attention. That had attributed to the rise of women's movement nationally and internationally.

The concept eventually became a multi-disciplinary issue as academics with different background and discipline such as in social sciences adopted the strategy of viewing the concept in the context of feminist ideological leaning or angle. Despite the great turnover of research in the area of gender discrimination and gender inequality, there still remains an unprecedented gap about the existence of gender inequality (Tyaden & Theonnes, 1998).

Ishaku, (2020) observed that, for any society to develop and not be lopsided, the female child should be given quality education. He further added that girl child education is a strategic development priority. Research has shown that millions of girls do not have

access to school despite the concerted efforts to push the cause forward.

Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) in Ishaku (2020) identified child labour, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth, truancy, broken homes, engagement of children as house helps as factors in the wheel of children inaccessibity to education.

A new report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has revealed that 129 million girls across the globe still lack access to education. Not less than 50% of the population affected, are domiciled in sub-Saharan Africa.

Grace (2023) opined that Nigeria and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa needed to invest more to achieve its girl child education targeted for the girl child ahead of 2030.

According to the United Nation's International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Africa's most populated country accounts for 15% out of school children worldwide. About 7.6 million girls are being deprived access to quality education. UNICEF (Nigeria) representative, Christian Munduate stated this in an event organized to commemorate International Day of the Girl 2023 in Kano, Nigeria. However, there seems to be glimmers of hope arising from an NGO, Adolescent Girls Initiative for learning and Empowerment (AGILE) project of the Nigerian government for the girl child in the area of having opportunity to embrace education.

In recognition of the evil associated with gender discrimination, the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for equality of all gender which breaks patriarchal norms that most affect women and girls through sensitization programs and creating awareness against gender inequality as well as making strategic policies on education, employment and inclusiveness of women and girls in national programmes.

By the year 2020, the then president of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari was quoted on January l6, 2020 as saying that Nigeria has 13.2 million out of school children. Out of this number, the girl child accounts for 60% which is 7.92 million. In the southern part of Nigeria, which comprise of three geo-political zones: The South East, South South and the South West, the South West shows a better improvement in the development of girl child education than in other zones. South south and South East zones cannot compete favorably with the south west zone in the area of girl child enrollment in primary and secondary school level, not to mention the tertiary level of education as compared to boy's enrolment. This automatically creates awareness on the backwardness about women and girl child education within the study area.

Anyanwu (2020) expressed that the most common socio-cultural factors associated with gender inequality, such as male chauvinism, hung its belief on women inferiority to men. The worth of a female being the extent to which they perform as sexual objects, dutiful mothers and wives. Their major role is limited to appendage role of bearing children, bringing them up and doing menial work with low wages.

Another aspect is the issue of patriarchy, an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. A system where men are the primary authority, have the central roles of political leadership, moral authority and control of properties (Aina, 1998).

Carole (1988) observed patriarchy to be a construction of the differences between masculinity and femininity as the political differences between freedom and subjection. She further expressed patriarchy to be a strong influence on modern civilization in which the female genders are left in the mercies and dictates of the males.

Traditional belief also contributes to the hampering of a girl child education. There is an ardent belief that a girl cannot remain in the family to procreate, preserve and maintain the family lineage like the boys would do. Also, the boys are presumed to replace their father's name when they are long gone in the case of death. For that reason, it is safer and better to invest in training a male child to advance in education to the detriment of a female child because of the assurances that the boys would protect the family name and lineage.

(Ishaku (2020) maintained that poverty and impoverish condition of the people could serve as a barrier to a girl child education thereby leading to pushing the girls into early marriage and or sending them into the street for hawking to make a living that could meet the family needs.

Statement of the Problem

In virtually every part of the world, women irrespective of their status, class, age, religious belief as well as ethnic groups experienced gender inequality in all spheres of life, either at home, school, workplaces, community and in government institutions. The United Nation's (UN) have made advancement on gender equality through various agreements nationally and internationally as in Beijing declaration and platform for actions and the convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and girls equal rights as well as national initiatives groups like the 'Bring back our Girls', Better life for rural women and others. With every concerted efforts put in place by the organizations about gender equality, issues of inequality between girl child and male child in education still persist.

There was a time, when people believed that it was unnecessarily irrelevant to educate a girl child. Today, people have come to a realization that girl child education is essential for human society and development. Based on regression, it is being argued that the money spent on training a girl child in education becomes a waste of resources IDC (2016).

The convention on the rights of the child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW, 1993) established it as the basic human right in the area of empowerment for women and girls. In today's world, there are clear examples of discrimination and inequality against women and girl child as women account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults and girl child account for two-thirds of the world's children without access to education and out-of-school children.

Female child education is a strategic development priority in every society. Educating a female child creates an opportunity to be well informed about nutrition and healthcare awareness, marry at a later age, have fewer children and give them better training and upbringing as well as contributing meaningfully to the society development.

Despite the aforementioned, inequality still exist in the area of equal access to education for the girl child. In any case, where a girl child manages to attend a school, many factors like

poverty, early marriage, broken homes and street hawking paved the way to dropping out of school. Hence, this study intends to examine the possible role of a female child education in re-defining gender inequality in Nigeria.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to discover the role of female child education in re-defining gender inequality in Nigeria. Specific objectives are as follows:

1. To ascertain if there are cases of inequality in education against female child in Nigeria.
2. To uncover the root causes of inequality in education against female child and
3. To identify the challenges facing a girl child education in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. Are there cases of inequality in education against female children in Nigeria?
2. What are the possible causes of inequality in education against female children?
3. What are the challenges facing a girl child education in Nigeria?

Concepts of a Female Child Education.

According to United Nation's International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2023), investing in girl child education can transform communities, nation and the world at large. Female child who receives education are less likely to marry young and more likely to lead a healthy and productive lives than those without education. They earn higher wages, participate in decision making especially in the area that most affects them, and build better future for themselves and their families. Girl's education has the tendency of strengthening economies and reducing inequality. It serves to create more stable, robust societies whereby all individuals, including boys and men, have the opportunity to realize their potentials. But education for girls is not just about access to school. It's also about girls feeling safe in classrooms and being supported in the subjects and careers of interest in which they choose to pursue including those they are often under- represented.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is a global syndrome. Considering the dimensions of economic and gender inequality, women still earn less than men in the formal work sector; they are more likely to live in poverty, are less likely to participate in the formal work sector, and they do a larger share of work in the household sector. The dimensions of political gender inequality include women's lower representation in elected offices and lower representation in political and corporate appointments. Social inequality includes being victims of domestic violence, harassment and sexual assault.

Gender Equality

In a statement by UNFPA (United Nation's Fund for Population Activities) on breaking barriers and investing in the future of women and girls (2024) in Johannesburg, came up with the theme " invest in women" which underscores the importance of meaningfully working together to advance gender equality and empowering women and girls in all spheres of life.

Gender equality and harmful gender norms contribute significantly to the inability of women and girls to claim their rights to bodily autonomy. Only 55% of women were reported as having the freedom to determine if and when they want to start a family. Moreover, many women continued to experienced gender-based violence daily. In Southern Africa, a shocking 17% of women and girls have experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months and more than 8% have experienced sexual violence by someone who is not an intimate partner. This lack of autonomy significantly affects women's and girls' ability to protect themselves from HIV transmission. Addressing the structural barriers which threatens the health, safety, dignity and life aspirations of adolescent girls and young women requires a multifaceted approach to address poverty, racism, gender-based violence, harmful gender norms stigma and discrimination. However, the spotlight initiative, the multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nation has embarked on a promising mission to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by the year 2030.

Right to Education

Education is not a privilege. It is a human right. Education as a human right is the right to access education, legally guaranteed for all without discrimination. It is further stated that every states and countries have the obligation to protect, respect and fulfill the right to education. There are ways to hold states accountable for violations or deprivations of the right to education. That includes demonstration by the students or individuals affected through the deprivation and perhaps, strike action to bring the state to do the needful. In accordance with the Right to Education Act of 2009, children between the ages of 6 and 14 are to get free and obligatory elementary education, regardless of their gender, caste, creed, or family income. As part of its mission to promote global development and fulfill its strategic objective, the World Bank Organization works to guarantee that women and girls have access to high-quality education.

The World Bank Group twin goals include ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.

Importance of Girl Child Education

Punch Newspaper (2023) mentioned that a significant function of education of the girl child in Nigeria is that, it offers her the opportunity to chart her destiny with the skills and information she acquired from basic education up to tertiary education. The learned skills and education obtained gives a girl child the know-how in channeling her course and making decision which can favour her life, family and community. When a girl child is developed, her

wellbeing and prospect receives attention. She can manage home, contribute to nation building and address structural barriers that threaten health, safety, dignity and life aspirations.
Nawrozzada (2022) argues that education is a tool for girls and women to claim their rights, helps to realize potentials in economic, political and social aspects, and is the most powerful way to lift people out of poverty. For the girl child, it is one of the first steps to participate in society and freeing herself from economic exploitation and patriarchal oppression. Education is an instrument that is capable of correcting inequality in the society. The exclusion of girls from education denies them the opportunity to develop their potentials and to play a crucial role in the families, country and the world at large.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the sociology of social inequality as propounded by Ashley Crossman (2020). The theory argues that social inequality results from a society organized by hierarchies of class, race and gender that unequally distributes access to resources and rights. Such can manifest in varieties of ways like income and wealth inequality, unequal access to education and cultural resources. Social inequality goes hand in hand with social stratification. Discrimination of an individual within communities and institutional levels is a major part of the process of reproducing social inequalities of race, class, gender and sexuality. For example, women are systematically paid less than men for doing the same work. By relating Crossman's theory of social inequality to the above study, it can be deduced that the presence or existence of inequality in any given society can lead to the problem of economic and social development strategies in the society. There are possibility of such hampering female contribution to economic, social, cultural and political development thereby leading to not fulfilling human rights and fundamental freedom of a girl child.

Methodology

The research method underpinning this study is survey research method. Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were obtained through journals and other related publications while primary data were collected through online interview and questionnaire. Interview was conducted to augment information collected through questionnaire. The population of this study is 5,459,000. The sample size is 400 according to Taro Yamane's calculation formula. Convenience sampling technique was used to select samples from the study area. Structured questionnaire was used for the study. Likert scale was adopted to measure the intensity or the degree of agreement by the respondents to a statement that describes a situation, phenomenon, item or a statement (Asika, 2002).

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Data used for the study were gathered through questionnaire distribution from the residents in the South Eastern State of Nigeria. A total of 360 questionnaires were completed and returned out of 400 questionnaires administered within the study area.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents on cases of inequality in education against female child in Nigeria

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	161	45%
Agreed	92	25%
Strongly Disagreed	58	16%
Disagreed	49	14%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 1 above shows that about 161 respondents which in percentage is (45%) strongly agreed to the fact that cases of inequality in education against female child exists, 92 (25%) agreed. However, 58 (16%) strongly disagreed that cases of inequality in education against female child in Nigeria does not exist. 49 (14%) respondents disagreed on the statement while none were undecided. On the whole, it can be concluded that there are cases of inequality in education against female child in Nigeria as expressed by 161 respondents.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on the causes of inequality in education against female child

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	180	50%
Agreed	89	25%
Strongly Disagreed	38	10%
Disagreed	50	14%
Undecided	03	1%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 above revealed that out of 360 respondents, 180 (50%) strongly agreed on the causes of inequality in education against female child in Nigeria as it relates to preferential treatment for boys as against educating a girl child. 89 (25%) respondents agreed.38 (10%) strongly disagreed and 50 (%) disagreed while 3 (1%) respondents were undecided. The result indicates that 180 (50%) respondents strongly agreed that there are causes of inequality in education which affect female child potentials to aspire educationally.

Table 3: Major Challenges Facing a Girl-Child education

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Conception of female child as inferior to boys	102	28%
2.	Traditional ideology based on patriarchy	98	27%
3.	Poverty and impoverish condition of living	95	26%
4.	Government /Political policies Implementation	35	10%
5.	Inaccessibility to school	30	9%
	TOTAL	360	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 3 above shows the major challenges facing a girl child education. A total of 102 (28%) respondents perceived there's conception that female child are inferior to a male child. 98 (27%) consented to traditional ideology based on patriarchal belief that boys are more superior to a girl child. 95 (26%) believe that poverty and impoverish condition of living poses as a major challenge before a girl child, making it difficult for her to access education. 35(10%) believes on lack of governmental/political policies implementation as an obstacle to girl child education while 30(9%) sees lack of inaccessibility to school as a major challenge.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

As a matter of fact, the study shows that there are cases of inequality against girl child in education in Nigeria. The truth was revealed as 161 (45%) respondents attested to the fact that female children are not given adequate attention when it concerns education. Most people do not attach importance to female child education and as such it is seen as a waste of resources when invested in female child training. Much preference and attention are directed to male children while relegating the girl child to the background in the area of education. Coming to causes of inequality in education, a larger number of respondents totaling 180 expressed that there are causes which emanates from socio-economic factors such as lack of access to school, issue of early engagement and marriage stood as hindrances to girl child access to education. Other challenges range from girl inferiority to boys, traditional mentality and patriarchal ideological syndrome to poverty and poor standard of living as well as lack of governmental policies implementation. All of the issues raised, poses as a huge hindrances to a girl child from aspiring educationally or from exhibiting their potentials that could enable them to make an informed decision for themselves as well as contributes to the development of the families, communities and societies at large.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the data analysis and the discussion of findings above, it can be concluded that a girl child education can be used as a measure for re-defining inequality that may have existed within the framework of the society and thereby paved the ways to vibrant development of a given country or nation. Hence, the study recommends that an affirmative action toward effective realization of a girl child development through constitutional representation in law should be made to express inclusiveness of women and girls in taking careers of their choices and also making available provision for safety environment in schools.

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