

Influence of Gender Discrimination on Girl Child Education in Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the prevalence of gender discrimination and its impact on girl child education in Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to assess the level of awareness of gender discrimination in Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State, to identify societal beliefs influencing girl child education, to explore factors hindering girl child participation in education, and to examine the effects of gender discrimination on societal development. The study utilized a descriptive survey method with a sample size of 120 respondents, including both male and female teachers from 10 schools in Odogbolu. A researcher-designed questionnaire with a validity index of 0.86 was employed for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed an alarming level of awareness regarding gender discrimination in Odogbolu, with a majority of girls being treated as inferior. Significant relationships between societal beliefs and girl child education were identified. Discrimination against the girl child was found to be more prevalent in rural areas. Factors such as early marriage, cultural issues, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and religious bias were identified as hindrances to girl child education. The effects of gender discrimination on societal development include dropout rates, mental health issues, inadequate female representation, poor academic performance among teachers, and limited access to education for girls. The major recommendations are to implement awareness programs to address gender discrimination, enforce policies to protect the rights of girl children, provide support systems for girls facing societal barriers, and promote community involvement in advocating for girl child education.

Keywords: Gender, Discrimination, Girl Child, Education, impunity.

1. Introduction

Girl-child education is a catch-all term for a complex set of issues and debates surrounding (primary education, secondary, and tertiary and health education in particular) for girls and women.

Denying the girl-child access to education implies making her a dysfunctional member of society. Statistics show that many girls are not enrolled in

school. The global figure for out-of-school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million are girls with over 80 per cent of these girls in Sub-sahara Africa including Nigeria (UNICEF, 2007). Girl-child education also includes areas of gender equality, girl-child reproductive health, prevention and management of rape and sexual abuse, access to education and its connection to the alleviation of poverty, and good governance, which are major ingredients in averting crime against women. Today's girl-child education is for her tomorrow's living.

In Nigeria, girls' access to basic education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 per cent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. The 2006 National School Census (NSC) revealed a net enrollment ratio (NER) of 80.6% suggesting that a substantial proportion (19%) of the primary school age population (6-11 years) is not enrolled in primary schools nationwide. This represents about 5 million Nigerian children aged 6-11 years old who do not access primary education. (Alabi T. & Alabi O.S; 2012)

Nigeria's out-of-school population is the largest in the world and it is growing. Of the staggering 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria today, the majority are girls. To promote girls' access to quality basic schooling, these data must be accurately and appropriately disaggregated to support efforts towards gender equality in education in Nigeria. Increased access to education is viewed as the means for achieving gender parity and progress in economic development. However, limited access to education for girls in Nigeria and in many other developing countries persists and continues to be a major concern for policymakers and the international community. Disparity in access to educational opportunities is a pressing gender equity issue in Nigeria (World Bank, 2003).

It is against this background that Now is the time to deliver on the Federal Ministry of Education's mission of education to foster the development of all Nigerian citizens to their full potential.

Fisho-Orideji, (2001) affirmed that the girl-child problem around the world has many dimensions but the root of all kinds of discrimination and bias against the girl child lies in the customs, traditions and typical mindset of the society which considers the girl child and women as inferior beings. Women and girls have been treated in the most inhuman ways from the inception of human civilization. Whereas, Igube, (2004) believes that the legacy of injustice against the girl child has continued in some parts of the world, especially in African and

In some Nigerian societies; they believe that it is an abomination to educate a female. They believe that women are supposed to be good cooks and mothers. Hence, the education of the girl child is seen as a threat to male chauvinism. Some men believe that once the girl child is educated, she will be difficult to control and she could become loose, immoral and promiscuous. Consequently, society in most cases sees the girl-child as a second fiddle; as a result, little or no effort is made towards her education especially when the parents are made to choose between educating the male-child and the girl-child.

These traditional practices/beliefs impose a lot of restrictions on female gender education. It is regrettable that despite our progress as a society there is still an underestimation of the value of the girl-child. The psychological effect of gender discrimination and socio-cultural beliefs on the girl-child is the internalization of the low value accorded them by society. Hence, this study, therefore, seeks to ascertain the effects of gender discrimination on girl child education in the Odogbolu Local Government area of Ogun State.

1.1 Research Questions

For this study, the following research questions have been generated;

- i. What is the level of awareness on gender discrimination of the girl child education in Odogbolu LGA?
- ii. To what extent do societal beliefs affect the girl child's education in Odogbolu?
- iii. What are the factors affecting the girl child's participation in education in Odogbolu LGA?
- iv. What effect does gender discrimination of the girl child have on the societal development in Odogbolu LGA?

2. Empirical Review of Literature

2.1 The Girl-Child and Gender Discrimination

The girl-child refers to a female child between the ages of 0-18. This period covers the crèche to pre-primary and laps at secondary school. The girl-child during this period is under the tutelage of the parents or guardians and older siblings. It is the developmental stage when character and personality are being built, and the physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional status starts progressing to get to the peak of adulthood. (Fishe-Orideji 2001)

The word "gender" is a generic term, normally used to indicate the distinction between humans based on the masculinity/femininity dichotomy. It is commonly used co-terminously with "sex" to connote or denote the male-female divide in the society. It is also regarded as a socio-cultural construct that assigns roles, attitudes and values, considered appropriate for each sex. This stereotyping has also led to the dogmatic propagation of gender bias as an accepted pattern

of behaviour, which has crept into all aspects of our lives, including education (Obielumani, 2010).

Gender discrimination is an act of distinguishing, perceiving, discerning and setting-apart people or group to their disadvantage. The process involves treating people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual merit or skills. Many training opportunities as well as career ladder have been either close to women or considerably less open to women than men.

In Nigeria, the belief that women's place is in the kitchen and they need not be educated still holds ground. Culture regulates our life at every time from the moment a child is born until he dies. There is constant pressure upon that child to follow certain types of behaviour that other men have created for us. The female child is given out in marriage at an early age. This is why Igube (2004) sees the diminished and relegated position of women as a result of society's unpalatable attitude towards the development of the feminine personality. The effect of such an attitude is a persistent imbalance in the development of sexes in the society. Igube also holds the view that the quality of pupils' performance at school depends on the home background. They think that there should be an intensified effort to make the home literate through Adult Education so that parents would be more inclined to stimulate the education of their male children as well as females. It is generally believed that the female always survives without formal education and that the only hope for the male child is to be educated. Eradicating this discriminating act would help women appreciate their values so that they would not be discriminated against in their day-to-day lives, and illiteracy too would be eradicated. There is no gain in saying that we are all influenced by gender. Gender norms (or rules) tell us what is appropriate for girls and for boys, women and men to do in our

society. Because of gender stereotypes, girls and women are often less valued and have lower social status.

2.2 Causes of Gender Discrimination

Various studies have shown that there is a very strong link between girls' literacy rates and religious beliefs and misconceptions. Tahir (2005) believed that a lot of wrong had been done by the advent of the missionaries who believed that women only needed to be trained in environmental sanitation, care of the home, clearing surroundings and child-rearing. To them, all these were enough and the country should accept them for that way of life. Most times when children are of school age, the picture that emerges is the familiar preference to send boys rather than girls to school. This is particularly noticeable where the economic resources to train all the children in a given family are not available; the female child is made to understand that primary six education might be too high an expectation for her.

The attitude of society and consequently the influence of parents and their attitudes to the education of their female offspring from her childhood have been very responsible for the low rate of female education. There is also the fear of some parents that while away from home, their daughters may lose their virginity, and get pregnant, which in some cultures reduces their prospects for marriage.

Government's lack of commitment to female education is a minus to bridging this inequality and gap. The problem of female access to education has been blamed also on externalized policies from some international agencies.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive survey design to investigate the impact of gender discrimination on girl child education. Descriptive survey design, as

described by Bass (2004), facilitates gathering opinions from a representative sample of the target population to infer perceptions or views of the entire study area population. This approach allows the use of research instruments to collect information from respondents. The population comprised 604 primary school teachers in Odogbolu Local Government Area of Ogun State. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select 120 respondents, consisting of 70 females and 50 males, representing 20% of the total population. The draft questionnaire, along with the research questions and study objectives, underwent review by experts to ensure face and content validity. The instrument exhibited high reliability with a coefficient of 0.86.

Table 1: Level of Awareness of the Respondents

S / N	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	\bar{x}	STD	Decision
1	Girls are often treated as inferior	40	47	13	20	2.89	0.6	Accepted
2	The percentage of girls enrolled in primary school remains significantly low	35	55	13	17	2.90	0.6	Accepted
3	Girls are often not given opportunity to pursue educational training	48	43	10	19	3.00	0.7	Accepted
4	Girls are less encouraged than boys to participate	40	70	8	2	3.23	0.9	Accepted

Table 3: Factors Affecting the Girl Child’s Participation in Education

S / N	ITEMS	S A 4	A 3	D 2	S D 1	\bar{x}	ST D	Decisi on
1	Family Abuse	55	57	5	3	3.37	0.9	Accept ed
2	Poverty	35	75	5	5	3.17	0.9	Accept ed
3	Early Marriage	48	60	7	5	3.26	0.9	Accept ed
4	Cultural issues	44	42	13	21	2.91	0.6	Accept ed
5	Inadequate school infrastructure	13	22	35	50	1.98	0.1	Reject ed
6	Domestic Violence	59	48	6	7	3.34	0.9	Accept ed
7	Economic issues	23	22	50	25	2.35	0.3	Reject ed
8	Teenage Pregnancy	50	50	12	8	3.18	0.8	Accept ed
9	Religious bias	39	49	16	16	2.96	0.6	Accept ed

Field Survey (2016)

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation obtained from the responses made by the respondents on factors affecting the girl child’s participation in education in Odogbolu. It was gathered that all the items 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18 and 19 respectively were positively rated to be satisfactory with an average mean score above 2.50, hence, were accepted. Meanwhile, item 15 and 17 had a mean score below 2.50 and were

rejected accordingly. Therefore, it can be concluded that Family abuse, poverty, early marriage, cultural issues, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and religious bias are possible factors affecting the girl child’s participation in education in Odogbolu, LGA of Ogun State.

Table 4: Effect of Gender Discrimination of the Girl Child on Societal Development

S / N	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	\bar{x}	STD	Decision
1	High incidence of dropout of girls in schools	55	50	10	5	3.29	0.9	Accepted
2	Serious impact on the mental health of the girl child	35	75	3	7	3.15	0.9	Accepted
3	Inadequate women teachers	48	62	8	2	3.30	0.9	Accepted
4	Poor academic performance of the girl child	37	65	4	14	3.04	0.8	Accepted
5	Deprived access to education for the girl child	63	52	5	0	3.48	1.0	Accepted

Field Survey (2016)

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation obtained from the responses made by the respondents on the effect of gender discrimination of the girl child on societal development. Items 20, 21, 22, 23 and 24 respectively were rated positively with an average mean score above 2.50, hence were accepted. The implication therefore is that;

high incidence of dropout of girls in schools, mental health effect of the girl child, inadequate women teachers, poor academic performance and deprived access to education for the girl child are possible effects associated with effect of gender discrimination of the girl child on societal development in Odogbolu

4. Discussion of Findings

Upon analyzing the results derived from the data collected from the respondents, the following findings regarding gender discrimination and girl child education in Odogbolu, Ogun State, were attained:

Based on the results gathered from Table 1 reflecting the level of awareness on gender discrimination with regards to the girl child education in Odogbolu, it was obtained that girls are often treated as inferior as this is evident in the percentage of girls enrolled in primary school which remains significantly low, more so, girls are often not often given opportunity to pursue educational trainings, also girls are less encouraged than boys to participate in social, economic and political functions, meanwhile, some children are particularly vulnerable when discriminated. These findings are consistent with the findings of several authors that gendered domestic duties and the fear of not benefiting from the investment on the education of girl-children inhibit girl-child education (Ekwukoma, 2014; Onochie, 2008; Chimombo et al, 2000; Osagie, 2008; Iruloh, 2008 and Idabawa, 2004a).

Based on the results obtained from Table 2, covering the relationship between the societal beliefs and the girl child education in Odogbolu, it was revealed that there is significant relationship between societal beliefs and girl child education. Consequently, in the traditional Nigerian society, there exists the degenerate believe that women are second class citizens, also, religion has

influence on the societal belief towards the girl child education, in addition, tradition has influence on the societal belief towards the girl child education, hence, discrimination against the girl child education occurs mostly in rural society. These findings are in agreement with the opinions of Imogie (2010), Osagie (2008) and Ekwukoma (2014) that there is a cultural subjugation of the girl-child to the boy-child, and that the society does not view the capacities and potentials of the woman beyond the kitchen. Also, this is agreement with the assertion of Haider, (2012) that religion belief and rules put significant impact on the lives of her people. It is well known that Islam itself does not devalue the status of women, the local practice and wrong explanation of Islamic rules creates discrimination against women.

The study revealed that the following factors affect the girl child's participation in education in Odogbolu as shown in Table 3; early marriage, cultural issues, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and religious bias. This result finding is in line with the assertions of Sandhu et al, (2005) and Bunyi (2004a) give credence to the fact that the inhibition of girl-child education by certain cultural beliefs is not a peculiarity of the Nigerian society. Consequently, this is similar with the view of Asmal (2003) that the traditional society gives little or no recognition to the efforts or contributions of women to national development following domestic violence and religions conflicts. Also, Offorma (2003) noted that most rural parents are not willing to invest in the education of their female children since such investment may well inhibit their chances of getting married on time.

Finally, results obtained in Table 4 showed that the following are the possible effect of gender discrimination of the girl child on societal development in Odogbolu; high incidence of dropout, mental health, inadequate women teachers, poor academic performance and

deprived access to education for the girl child. This agrees with the opinion of Haider (2012) that girl child discrimination leads to dropout as well as the findings of Offorma (2009) that discrimination against the girl child could result to child labor, forced marriage and mental health and poor performance in school.

5. Conclusion

There are many factors that militate against the girl-child education. In some Nigerian societies; they believe that it is an abomination to train a female. The society in most cases sees the girl-child as a second fiddle; as a result, little or no effort is made towards her education especially when the parents are made to make a choice between the male-child and the girl-child. In addition, some parents discriminate against the girl-child in terms of training, role models and skills. The parents, teachers and other members of the society see the girl-child's place as to be curtailed to housekeeping jobs. However, when the girl-child is exposed to a type of education like the primary education, she will be able to read and write and therefore be in a better position to seek for further development of her potentials in higher institutions. Therefore, the education of the girl-child should be given adequate attention in Nigeria.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

The media including the television, print-media and radio should help to design enlightenment programmes in local languages as familiar as possible that will not only help to capture parents' interests in educating their children, but also help to disabuse them of the constricting misconceptions and beliefs that are inhibitions to girl-child education.

The various religious groups such as Muslim, Christian and African Traditional associations should help to teach parents the true positions of their religion on girls' education. The associations should help develop programmes that would assist parents and families in educating their daughters.

In view of the importance of the girl-child in Odogbolu in particular and the nation in general, all stake-holders in the education sector will have to do more to eliminate these factors militating against the girl-child education by: Restructuring the primary school curriculum to eliminate all gender stereo typed experiences; Training the present set of teachers through seminars on the dangers of gender biased teaching; Restructuring teacher training curriculum to eliminate all gender stereo typed tendencies and ensuring that parents do not bring up the children in a gender stereo typed environment.

There is need for adequate monitoring and supervision of the girl child education at both primary, secondary and tertiary levels so as eliminate gender discrimination in the educational system and improve formulation and implementation of policies for enhancing and supporting female education.

The government needs to encourage the female students and teachers by provision of funds, instructional materials and adequate supervision and monitoring of schools in order to improve the education of the girl child with a view of enhancing their academic performance.

Government should take stringent measures against parents who refused to send their female children to school. And parents should be encouraged to send their daughters to school either by the award of scholarship or reduction in fees paid to government. There should also be more adult centers for the training of adult women in the society, which should spread across the

country especially in the rural areas. And more women should be included in the policy-making bodies, so that the interest of women will be reflected in policies.

Educational planners should encourage teachers to adapt the motivational learning strategies towards improving achievement of the girl child in school through both qualitative and quantitative research.

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