An Assessment of Girl-Child Access to Higher Education in Niger State: A Case Study of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai-Niger State

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Abstract*: - Education is a transformation tool, an instrument of empowerment and manpower drive for national development and every child is entitled to equal opportunity to free and compulsory basic and higher education based on their individual ability. Although general enrolment into school has increased in Niger State has gone higher, access to higher education by girl children has not increased commensurably due to socio-cultural factors. The objective of this study is to examine the socio-cultural factors that are encumbering to girl-child access to higher education in Niger State. This study examines the girl-child marginalization with unequal access to higher education compared to her male counterpart. The study reveals that cultural practices serve as hindrance to female-child education and that inaccessibility of the female-child education makes her vulnerable to early marriage, denial of fundamental rights and child labour. The paper concluded that if female-child education is fostered, she would be self-reliant, adequately and appropriately socialized and well empowered to contribute meaningfully to the community as well as acquire skills of problem-solving to an appreciable extent. The paper therefore recommends that education should be made accessible to the female-child at all levels and awareness programme should be mounted to redeem the image of the female-child to make the world a better place for her to live.*

Keywords*: - Assessment, Education, Tertiary, Girl child, Universal, Culture*

1. Introduction

Every child and young person should have an equal opportunity for basic, higher as well as tertiary education to prepare him/her for employment. There should therefore, be no barrier to educating girls, only when girls and women have unhindered access to quality education can their potentials be fully developed and society made better by their contributions (Musa, 2005)because if girl-children (and later woman) are educated the nation is the better for it, as the sayings goes. Thus, girl-child education has become a modern day discourse to nations in the world because girl-children are usually discriminated against in all spheres of life including education.

In Nigeria, as in many developing economics, there is a gender gap in literacy with women at a disadvantage; this has led to government increase in literacy drive for girls in particular at the basic education level. Because of this, there is a tendency for government not to take cognizance of what goes on at the tertiary level particularly as it relates to female enrolment. Although, Nigeria educational reform as stated in National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDs) document also shows considerable focus on girls' higher education, it recognizes education as the vital transformational tool and a formidable inducement for socio-economic empowerment. In other words, education is critical to meeting the goals of increasing the percentage of senior secondary school and senior secondary technical school graduates who go on to tertiary institution to 20 %; increasing adult literacy rate to 65% and ensuring all tertiary institutions establish sustainable programmes of physical development.

Nevertheless, despite the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights a lot of Nigerian girls and women are still not enrolled at the tertiary level

(Wikepedia, 2012). Achieving gender parity in education is one of the aims of the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is a primary objective of the 1990 World declaration on Education for All (EFA) as well as the Dakar Framework of Action (2000). Until date however, gender equality remains elusive (Atama, 2014).

1.1 Historical Perspective of Gender Gap in Education in Nigeria

For a long time, women constitute the majority of illiterates in Nigeria (Obaji, 2009). At all level of education, male gender represents higher proportion than that of the female counter part (FOS, 1995). In 1990, the proportion of literate men to women was 54:31 and the total female literacy rate was far below 15%, while that of men was above $0%. Study surveys in 2005 and 2013 show that 33.7% of females had no form of education in Borno, Yola, Adamawa, and Bauchi the North Eastern States of Nigeria; 87.8% in Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa, and Zamfara- North Western States women had no formal education. Furthermore, UNICEF (2013) averred that Northern States have Nigeria's worst girl-child education profile. The project statistics from the survey reveal the States could only end up in high female illiteracy level with highest adolescent girl-marriage, highest under-15 childbearing rate, and highest risk of maternal injury and death compare to the case in Southern States. In the Southern Statres (Abia, Akwa-Ibon, Rivers, Imo, Cross-River, Anambra)only 36.2% of women have no formal education. In the South-West, (Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, etc) at least 26.1% of women had no formal education. The middle-Belt States (Plateau, Benue, Taraba, Kwara, Niger, Kogi) are in between the South and North in terms of average figures of illiteracy of women. In addition, Sanusi (2014) affirmed that 93% of girl-children in the northern States (of Nigeria) lacked secondary education. According to him, Jigawa State for example had a school completion rate for as low as 7% and 70% in the entire North West of women between the age of 20 and 29 years are unable to read and only 3% complete secondary education. This is attributed to some factors which are cultural and attitudinal according to El-Rufa'I (2014).

According to him, the case of many fathers considering it not wise to educate their female children. This he said is manifested in street hawkers and child brides experienced in families when girl-children did not go to school while the boy-children did, thereby causing half of the Nigerian population to live sub-optimally because of not having access to education. To this regards, he added that poor girl education is very harmful not only to the girl-child but to the entire nation because 'illiterate mothers tend to produce uneducated and vulnerable children that are willing recruits of insurgents, ethnic bigots and sundry criminals'.

The enrolment of candidates in tertiary institutions demonstrates discrimination against females. There are remarkable disparities according to Regions and States. However, gender disparities are common in all region and states. In all the states and Regions of Nigeria,, women lag behind men in access to education. For instance only 7.6% of women interviewed in the Northern part of Nigeria had some primary education, whereas, in the Southern part of Nigeria at least 25.9% received some education. In the case of primary school enrolment, only 12% of female children of school age are registered in the primary schools. In the South, 44.4% of girls are in primary schools. By the time girls reach secondary school age, only about 4.2% of them in northern Nigeria and 37% in Southern Nigeria are allowed to continue. This shows a sharp discrimination against women at all levels (FOS, 1995). The situation in the rural areas is even worse.

1.2 Conceptual Clarifications

1.2.1 Assessment in this paper, assessment refers to an appraisal of the accessibility of girl-children to higher education.

1.2.2 Education, according to Nwokeocha (2012) is the deliberate designs, strategies and process intended to nurture and develop individuals in society, organized and practicalized within specialized d institutions recognized for that purpose. It is also a process of transmitting knowledge, skills, and ands values to individuals for their optimal performance and survival in society and for their empowerment to contribute maximally

positively and meaningfully to the development of society. Another definition given by UNESCO says 'education is the process by which societies deliberately transmit their accumulated information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies, and behaviors across generation'. While Amadi (2011), viewed education as, 'the act of systematic development or training of the mind, capabilities or characters through instruction or study. According to Gwarjiko (2003), education refers to 'the process of instruction and teaching of people in either formal or non-formal settings. It encompasses the dissemination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, within and outside the formal system'. Be it as it may, education from the various definitions given above, can take up formal and non-formal methods through which it can be transmitted. Thus, while some methods are deliberate and systematic others are informal and therefore not necessarily transmitted in specific designated places like in the first two definitions.

1.2.3 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals, are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all addressing the universal challenges faced, and a call to end poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice and protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html) Retrieved 2nd March 2019). The SDGs are building blocks to Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which came into effect in January 2016, to guide UNDP policy and funding until 2030 covering about 170 countries.

1.2.4 Tertiary education refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values imparted or acquired at post-secondary level of education through scientific, technological, physical, intellectual and moral means. According to the Revised National Policy on Education (2004), tertiary education refers to the education that is provided in universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, Colleges of Technology, the Advanced Teachers Training Colleges, Colleges of Agriculture, Schools/Colleges of Nursing, and such institutions as may be allied to them. The aims of tertiary education are expected to be pursued through teaching, research and pursuit of service to the community and the dissemination of existing new information.

1.2.5 Universal Basic Education, Higher and Tertiary Education. These concepts are used in this paper to refer to common or ordinary education made available to individuals during the first 21 years of an individual. Tertiary education prepares one for employment. Therefore, the next four years after secondary education are meant for tertiary education to shape an individual's career. This, it is expected will enable the young ones to acquire the skills that they will use to make a living in adulthood.

1.2.6 Principles and Rationale of Universal Basic Education

From 1998 when Nigeria returned to democracy, the country has embarked on the path to sustainable development through a comprehensive, well-articulated economic and social reform programmes with education at heart. In addition, the rationale for basic education was pursued to equipping individuals with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to live meaningful and fulfilling lives. It also aimed at contributing to the overall development of societies. Derive maximum social, economic and cultural development of societies and derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society to enable them discharge their civic obligations.

Although, education enrolment in Nigeria has improved, a lot need to be done in terms of differences in the enrolment of girl-children. For example, 84% of school age children attend school while the net enrolment ratio in primary education rose to 89.6% in 22007 compare to 87.9% in 2006. The literacy rate of 15-24 year olds also improved to 81.4% as against 80.2 in 2006. Despite the success, there is an urgent need to meet gender gap in enrolment of pupils/students to schools (FGN, 2008).

1.3 Government and Girl-Child Education

Government has made efforts to reduce gender gap particularly in secondary education. There is government affirmative action on women education believing that this will pave way for them to achieve higher education. For instance, some of the Unity Schools owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria are for girls only. Invariably, this development has reduced (to some extent) gender gap in education particularly secondary education which invariably will affect enrolment at the tertiary level. In spite of government efforts, there are still gaps due to problems (MDGs Report, 2008; National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2005).

Other reasons include lack of capacity to monitor and mainstream gender issues into education programme and most importantly, lack of fund. There is also socio-cultural problem which hinder the full participation of girls in school, when funds are limited in the family, preference is given to educating boys over girls while girls are used to run errand at home and as caregivers in the family. Other socio-cultural problems include harmful traditional practices that affect girls emotionally and cultural practice such as early marriage and in some cases where religion constraints girls for aspiring into higher status as boys.

There are other issues such as unwanted pregnancies, which often lead to dropout among others. The high incidences of pre-marital sexuality have more negative impact on girls rather than boys and in most cases has had effects on girl's education. Generally, female adolescents tend to commence sexual activities earlier than boys (Olukoya and Elias, 1996) and these sexual activities often have critical consequences, which tend to be more serious for girls than boys (Pasam, 1992). When sexual activities result to pregnancy, there are negative consequences for females than males. It is the girls that are expelled from schools and often terminate their education and they face the shame and social cost of seeking clandestine abortion.

Puberty and sexuality add another layer to the challenge of achieving gender equality in education, and especially so in contexts where school girls are vulnerable to sexual violence, to unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). These among other reasons have limited girls to higher education all over the world. One distinct fact about women education in Nigeria is that, fewer women apply for entry to universities as a result of fewer girls completing secondary education. Of importance to note again is the fact that a smaller proportion of female applicants succeed in gaining admissions is a reflection of girls' relatively lower success rates in the senior certificate examination (UNESCO, 2003).

In Niger State, achieving universal basic not to talk of tertiary education has remain a major challenge because of the gap between male and female candidates' access to education (Government Of Niger State Millennium Development Goal Report, 2006). Poverty has however been attributed to be the major cause for the trend. Unfriendly attitude and lack of full appreciation of girl's education in addition to economic harsh condition are said to account for the inaccessibility of female to higher education (NSMDGR, 2006). Consequently, this portends serious constraint to accessibility for higher education. Low accessibility to tertiary education in effect poses a threat to women's education plays significantly on family health and well-being. For example, female students' enrolment into tertiary institutions in Niger State Polytechnic from 2011 to 2013 reveals the dwindling nature of the girl-child education in Niger State. Likewise, the admission into Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai in Niger State portrays a similar picture.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The main problem of the study is to examine girl-children participation in higher education in Niger State with a view to finding out the extent to which the gender gap has affected females in higher education.

1.5 Objective

1) To examine socio-cultural factors that influences gender gap in tertiary education in Niger State.

2 Methodologies

2.1 Location of the Study

The study was carried out in Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai in Niger State where the six faculties were visited.

2.2 Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were used for the study. One hundred and twenty five (125) questionnaires were administered to selected final year students of IBBU Lapai, (IBBUL) Niger State. The questionnaires generated information about challenges to girl-child education.

The study employed descriptive research design. The population of the study consisted of the students of higher institutions in Niger State. Specific consideration was given to IBBUL. Data used in this study were majorly secondary data obtained from Niger State Ministry of Education, Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), Academic Secretary and Directorate of Academic Planning of IBBU, Lapai and Niger State Polytechnic. The researcher's primary data were obtained through a questionnaire administered on 125 female final year students purposively selected across the six faculties of the IBBUL. Data collected were analysed using simple percentages.

2.3 Data Analysis

SPSS software was used to analyse data gathered from the closed ended questionnaires administered on respondents producing the percentages for the study.

3 Findings

Table 1 showing the number of female candidates admitted in to IBBUL Niger State 2011-2013

Year Of Admission	Male	Female	Total
2011	1077	556	1633
2012	1253	662	1915
2013	1516	731	2247
2014	1739	833	2572
Total	5583	2782	8367

Source: Registry (Admission), IBBU Lapai, (2015)

Table 1 shows that from 2011/2012 academic session to 2013/2014 academic session and admission of female candidates into IBBUL did not hit 1000 per session compared to admission of male candidates therein during the same period. For example, while the number of female candidates admitted into the University for the 4 sessions stood at 2782, the number of male candidates admitted for the same period stood at 5585 (Registry Department, IBBUL, 2015).

Apart from the disparity female candidates' experience, they were found to be in courses different from what they would have preferred. Nevertheless, they have their dream professions which were revealed in their responses. The information elicited revealed that 23.2%, (29) of the respondents preferred teaching in higher institutions followed by accounting profession, 16.8% (21). 13.6% (17) of the total respondents preferred journalism profession while those who preferred being directors of large companies are 12.8% (16) and 12% (15) will want to work with the police, immigration, custom, prison or any uniformed paramilitary organization. Those who wanted to work with banking administration sections of higher institutions constituted 8% (10) and 7.2% (9) of the respondents respectively. Preference for teaching in post primary schools recorded the least responses with 1.6% (2) respectively. Nevertheless, women participation in higher education can take them out from poverty level and lead to sustainable development. This can be testified by the recent past bunch of women leaders in the past administration of President Goodluck Jonathan.

3.1 Girl Child Education and Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals provide that education is a fundamental human right and an enabling right and to fulfill this right, countries must ensure universal equal access to inclusive and

equitable quality education and learning, which should be free and compulsory, leaving no one behind irrespective of their gender, disabilities, social and economic situation. Education shall aim at the full development of the human personality, and promote mutual understanding, tolerance, friendship and peace. Education should go beyond basic literacy and numeracy skills, and equip individuals with creative, critical thinking and collaborative skills, while building curiosity, courage and resilience and as a public good, it should be the society's responsibility to make it available through fair process of public policy formulation and implementation, in which civil society, teachers and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth and children would have important roles in ensuring not only equal access to and complete education cycles, but also empowered equally in and through education (UNESCO's Education 2030 , Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action) Accessed 2nd March, 2019).

3.2 Challenges Facing Girl-Child Enrolment in Tertiary Institution in Niger State

Poverty rate in addition to societal negative attitude to girl education and lack of girl-child friendly infrastructures are some of the challenges that obstruct girl-child accessibility to tertiary education. Other challenges are lack of gender sensitivity in curricula, teaching and or teaching materials and lack of mobilization in the geo-political zones of the affected girls-children. The institutional challenges of tertiary institutions in Niger State include;

1. Lack of commitment to the aims and objectives of establishing some of the higher institution.
2. Weak or bad leadership
3. Misappropriation of funds and misplacement of priorities.
4. High fees charges which often deprive many qualified persons from access to higher education;
5. Bureaucratic bottle neck in administration.
6. Unqualified or unskilled staff.
7. Shortage of necessary infrastructures, such as class rooms, seats, and road networks;

8. Poor condition of health facilities and dormitories or hostels.
9. Shortage of clean water, sporting and recreational facilities.
10. Lack of assessment or review of programmes and policies to ascertain their achievement.
11. Changes in leadership at government and institutional levels.

A major challenge facing not only tertiary educational sector in Niger state according to NSMDGR, (2006) is how to finance the various educational programs at all levels. Poor funding, lack or limited transparency and accountability with non-inclusion of stakeholders in the management of educational resources are other major challenges facing educational sector in Niger state. Culture and religion are strong factors that pose great challenge to education in Niger state. For example, the purdah system of seclusion bars women from receiving adequate schooling particularly in the adult education programme.

The repositioning higher institutions in order to achieve higher education entails refashioning, reviewing and redirecting tertiary education to suit the realities and demands of the present society. In addition it can be said to involve meaningful and functional innovations. Niger state operates the 9-3-4 National Policy on Education. With adequate resources, tertiary institutions could be repositioned in such a way that they will manifest in ensuring mass girl-child education without obstacles.

3.3 Discussion

Data from Federal Ministry of Education (2003) averred that gap exist in admission between boys and girls into primary through Universities so that the gap that begins in the primary school become a gender gulf at the tertiary level. For instance, figures provided have shown that the enrolment of males is consistently higher than that of female in the primary and secondary schools as well as in tertiary institutions. No doubt, this development is bound to have a multiplier effect on the transition rate of pupils from primary schools to tertiary institutions (FME, 2003)

According to MDGs Report (2007), educational enrolment has been a success because of improved policy and better inter-government coordination, which has led to improved and greater access to schools. However, despite the improvement, the report further cited inadequate spread of resources, poverty, child-labour, etc as some challenges to accessibility to higher education by girl-children (National Bureau of Statistics Report, 2007).

4 Conclusions

Although the Niger state government is making progress in its effort to achieve parity educationally the subsisting disparity in gender education makes its achievement quite challenging. The quality of education requires significant improvement and strong political will to implement the national policy on education. In this place, the aims of tertiary education were highlighted; the challenges faced by girl-child to access tertiary education were also presented. Recommendation, which could serve as remedies to the achievement of equality in the attainment of education are also featured below.

5 Recommendations

The following recommendations can serve as a road map to repositioning tertiary education and institutions in order to achieve gender equality for tertiary education in favour of girl-children. Generally, girl-children should be given equal opportunity and treatment to maximize their potentials and raise the uninspiring female education status.

The government, non-government organizations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in education industry in Nigeria, must put the following strategies in place. The strategies are;

- Changing society attitudes in favour of girls' education
- Provision/enrichment of school infrastructure to make them more girl friendly
- Gender awareness training for teachers and teachers trainers.
- Guidance, counselling and assertiveness training for girls.

- Enhancing the gender sensitivity in curricula, teaching-learning materials, and classroom processes.
- Support for existing women in basic science-based course (mathematics, science and technology)

There is also a need to targeting and mobilizing supports in the geo-political zones (Agwara, Borgu, Rafi, Magama, in zone C; Munya Tafa, Paikoro in zone B; Gbako in zone A) where the gender gulf is very critical. Support for girls and women in very difficult circumstance should not be left out. Also important is the need for the promotion of the employment of women by government and private sector.

Government should also increase job opportunity for young female 'starters'-vocational training. Government affirmative action towards increasing massive support for access to and quality education for girls should continue. Closing the gender gap in science and technology education necessitates more government efforts in the area of establishing more science and technical colleges for girls only.

The need for intersectional collaboration on how to reduce the gender gap in higher education should evolve. Government and private sectors also encourage researches on how to close gender gap while various government and private sectors should establish Continuing Education Centres for girls and girl-child dropouts. Government at various level as well as non-governmental organizations should introduce scholarship to female students to pursue higher education. Furthermore, there is need for quantitative and qualitative free and compulsory education for girl child with conducive classrooms, books, libraries, laboratories and offices for effective learning.

Awareness campaigns should be organized regularly to encourage parents to enrol their female children/wards in schools which should be vigorously pursued by the various government, religious bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Negative attitudes of some parents towards female education and early marriage should be addressed

through sensitization programmes; also, girls-children that marry at an early age should be encouraged to continue to pursue education through self-efforts and government support;

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