

Cultural Factors on the Girl-Child Education in Secondary Schools in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This research examines the effect of socio-cultural factors on the Girl-Child education in secondary schools in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. It is a survey study. The research also took note of some key factors, which among other things, include the great attitude of parents towards girl-child education effect of early marriage. Influence of the family background and size and the socio-economic situation in the community. The findings showed that almost all the above mentioned factors are responsible for limited access of the girl-child education. To limit or reduce the effect of the factors, therefore, the researcher recommends and suggests more awareness campaign, not only for girls but also for parents to take seriously the education of their girl-child. Just as they do for their boy-child. The researcher also suggests ways for improving on girl-child in Ihiala community and all other communities that share similar cultural and socio-economic similarities with Ihiala community.

Introduction: Primary education started in Nigeria in the 1840s with the advent of the missionaries, because the traditional system of governance – the indirect rule of the British colonialists. The traditional rulers and chiefs who had the direct contact with the colonialists were very reluctant to send their children and wards to the early schools established because they were not sure of the motive of the British. Instead, the traditional rulers and chiefs sent children to slaves and others who were serving them as house-helpers to these schools. It was after these; slaves became literate and were employed by the missionaries as clerks and interpreters that dawned on the traditional rulers that could after all be beneficial to send their children to school.

Research Questions: Culture and tradition encourage female children to be given out early in marriage rather than educating them?

1. Female children from large families stay at home while the male children attend schools?

Men and women are assigned traditional roles to play in the society by their culture. In Ihiala for example, the traditional education is such that girl-child is made to understudy her mother while the boys are made to also understudy their father in their chosen professions. The expectation, therefore, was that the culture of the people never encourages the girl-child to do more, than help out in cooking food and doing other domestic chores. Over time, therefore, everybody imbibed the culture and the girl-child education suffered tremendously.

Informal education was what the culture requires to train and prepare both men and women for survival. What is known as formal education was introduced to Nigeria with the advent of British rule and the coming Christian Missionaries.

The problems of girl-child education have been in existence since the introduction of British rule in Nigeria. Parents were very reluctant to send their female children to school. This was partly because the traditional system of education often dictates that the place of the girl or woman in the society is in the home.

Primary education started in the 1850s with the coming of the missionaries in various parts of what is known today as Nigeria. The Christian Missionary Society (CMS) started both primary and secondary education in Nigeria. With this even the girls that are opportune to go to school gets pregnant because of lack of self discipline. They are forced to get married and this leads to good bye to education. But the ugly trend and reluctance to send girl-child to school because culture factors, which hitherto affected growth of girl-child education was checked as the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) activities started in Nigeria in 1948. According to Lekan Oyedejii, "The RCM opened girl's convent school in Abeokuta in 1886, St Agnes College Yaba Lagos for the training of women teachers in 1933. Soon, there were schools for girls, both primary and secondary in some other parts of southern Nigeria".

As parent were compelled by the prevailing situation to send their girls to these schools the all-pervading culture of the people gradually crumbled and the people's attitude towards girl-child started changing. The convent schools became popular in Ihiala local government, and subsequently produced female teachers who came back to the villages and communities to influence the opinion of the people towards sending their girls-child to school.

It is clear that parent's perception of the values of education is a strong reason for low enrollment of girl-child in schools especially in the rural areas. Parents, find it difficult to discuss sex education with their female children, the girls are easily influenced or deceived by men. And when they are not informed about the disadvantage, they fall into the problem of unwanted pregnancy, because majority of the girls mature while in primary school and early year of secondary school.

Research Question 1: Culture and tradition encourage female children to be given out early in marriage rather than educating them?

Table 1: Responses on Culture and Traditional Beliefs on Girl-Child Education

S/No	RESPONDENTS	A	%	D	%
1	Illiterate	46	92	4	8
2	Literate	5	0	185	97.4
	Total	51	21.2	189	78.75

Table 1 above shows that traditional belief on girl-child education. Respondents say that traditional belief system is a hindrance to girl-child education while most all the literate respondents said (185 of the 190) disagreed that traditional belief system is a hindrance to girl's education.

Research Question 2: Female children from large families stay at home while the male children attend school?

Table 2: Responses on Female Children from large Families stay at Home.

S/No	Respondents	A	%	D	%
1	Illiterate	50	100	0	0
2	Literate	0	0	190	100
	Total	50	21.2	189	78.75

Table 2 above states that illiterates are of the view that socio-economic factor is a barrier to girl-child education, but the literate respondents disagreed. The literate ones may have answered the question that way because of the poverty rate in Ihiala Local Government Area that affect education generally.

Discussion of Findings. From the analysis of the data collected, it was found that parents have no interest in the education of their female children, but gives more opportunity to the education of their male children.

However, family size also affected the education of the girls-child as most of them involve themselves into marrying several wives.

Summary of the work. The cultural factors militating against girl-child education are the erroneous beliefs that education of girls-child makes her promiscuous and bring about unwanted pregnancy. Early marriage seems to be the greatest obstacle to education of the girl-child. Also the belief that the girl-child should be responsible for child-rearing alone and take care of domestic duties after the education of the girl-child.

In fact, in every field of human endeavour, women can hold their own against men. What needs to be done is more education and mass campaign against the culture that still makes women feel inferior. Early marriage is still common in Ihiala community. Parents encourage or compel the girls to marry a few years after puberty because the culture of the Ihiala prescribes it, particularly among illiterates in the area. It is therefore, not surprising that from the findings, a little more than of the respondents still believe in early marriage. This fact, not withstanding, late marriages are becoming common as the girl-child themselves want to be educated by all means, although many still fall by the wayside as a results of poverty, unwanted pregnancy and influence of peer groups. One major issue against girl-child education and the influence of culture is that of socio-economic factor. Poverty is prevalent in Ihiala Local Government Area.

Conclusion. Morality or promiscuity has nothing to do with schooling or education as the findings from this study show in year gone by. The issue of pregnancy among school-age girls was talk of the town. Especially as the girls in schools were few and so negative news of unwanted pregnancy involving them becomes widespread in the rural community. But as the number of educated female increased over the years, the issues of unwanted pregnancy had less negative impact as the percentage of girls becoming pregnant is very few, compared with the number of female enrolment in schools.

Recommendations. From the findings, it may be necessary to recommend the following:

1. Regular campaigns and seminars should be held in the rural areas about the importance of girl-child

education.

2. Government should introduce sex education in both primary and secondary school curriculum.
3. More adult education centre should be opened in rural areas so that those who have left out as a result of the refusal of their parents to send them to school can benefit from adult education. After all, education is a lifelong process.
4. Gender studies should be included in the courses in faculty of education in universities.

This study has exposed parents who refused to give their girl-child education under the cover of cultural hindrances that after all, culture alone is not problem why teenage girls are not in school, particularly in the rural areas. Persons at the helm of affairs in our various ministries of education should consider seriously the issue of public enlightenment campaigns. Increasingly there are campaigns for positive change towards girl-child education. In doing so, some of the accomplished women in the professional fields should be used as role models especially the ones from particular rural communities should be used in posters and lectures as example.

Limitations of the Study. This study was limited to three towns in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. The major reason to conduct this research in only three towns in Ihiala was due to time and financial constraints which were not enough to cover all the towns and villages in the local government.

Suggestions for Further Studies. Due to the inclusive character of research, we will suggest that students look up to bringing more researches on this topic. Particularly we are suggesting that more researches should focus on:

- i. Educationists should encourage more research into gender study particularly on women education.
- ii. Research into the performance of adult education centres in the local government area may become necessary.
- iii. It may also be necessary to give grant to students who are interested impost-graduate studies in gender or in specialized areas of result education.

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