

THE GIRL CHILD AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION (A CASE STUDY OF NIGER STATE)

By

Usman Isah Ndashiru A.
Department of General Studies
Federal University of Technology, Minna

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the issue of Access of the Girl Child to Western education in Niger State. While the government of Nigeria over the years preaches education for all, without prejudice to any particular gender, does the girl child stand on the same pedestrian with her male counter part, when the real issue of enrolment and retention in school comes? To answer this pertinent question, a qualitative study was carried out in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Gurara, Borgu, and Mashegu. Ten (10) schools from each Local Government Areas (LGAs) comprising three junior Secondary Schools and seven Primary Schools, from rural and semi-urban centres were randomly selected for this study. The three local government areas selected were done from among over 15 educationally disadvantaged ones in the state. Focus Group Discussion (FGD), school Mapping, Transect walk and Observation methods of data collection were used on stakeholders which include pupils (boys and girls), and out of school children. Coding of responses from the stakeholders was used as method of data analysis. The finding reveals that ignorance of parents on the value of education particularly of the girl child, poverty, early marriage and absence of "role model" in some cases are the principal factors that stand between the girl child and western education in Niger state.

Introduction

Education is simply one aspect of socialization. It involves the acquisition of knowledge and learning of skills (Haralambos and Holborn 2004). Education emanates from conscious teaching and learning (Schafer, 2005). It is a deliberate effort of socializing individuals on the norms and values of any given society. Education is not only a potent vehicle on which society transmits its values or ensures social solidarity but also serves as a means by which individuals could develop their full potential as human beings (Dewey, 1953, Durkheim, 1961).

The National Policy on Education (1981) calls for "education for all" Successive governments of Nigeria over the years try to make basic education free. The Universal Basic Education law of 2000 has made basic education free and compulsory for boys and girls. A level playing field was equally preached.

As stated earlier, education helps to transmit culture, so culture also influence education. Against this background, people, for certain cultural factors, place premium on the education of the boy child at the detriment of the girl child.

This study is therefore an attempt to assess how the girl child fared in terms of her access to western education in Niger State. Education in this context means the formal system of education brought to Nigeria by the British colonialists. Emphasis is placed on basic education as the basis for formal systems of education in Nigeria

The paper is divided into seven parts. The first part contains the introduction while the second part has an overview of primary education in Niger State. Part three is where theoretical perspective is discussed, while part four discusses the methodology of the research. The discussion of main findings is contained in part five while summary and conclusion and recommendations are in parts six and seven respectively.

Overview of Primary Education in Niger State

Education is the bedrock of any societal development. Realizing this fact, the Government of Nigeria over the years has seen education as the greatest investment the nation can make "for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources" (National Policy on, 1981).

Primary education is then recognized as the key to basic education; in fact, it is the key to the success or failure of the whole education system. Consequently, primary education requires greater attention for it to play its foundational role properly.

With the establishment of the National Primary Education Commission (NPEC) in 1988, State Primary Education Board (SPEB) to ensure proper cash flow and management at National and State levels respectively, primary education began to improve. Ipaye (1996) and Adamu (1998) reported that the overall population of primary school pupils in Nigeria rose from 14.2 million in 1994 to 15.5 million in 1996.

In Niger State, the State Universal Basic Education Board, formally State Primary Education Board (SPEB), gave statistics that indicate that enrolment into public primary schools in the State had risen from 576,002 in 2004 to 5,794,176 at the close of 2006.

When the issue of Access and Equity is considered with regard to gender, statistics show that a great imbalance exists between boys and girls. Only 43% of primary School enrolments in 1991 were females. Indeed, the figures of female enrolment ranged from a low of 28.82% in Sokoto State to a high of 49.4% in Oyo State (Nwagwu, 1998).

Women Education is at the heart of any meaningful development. When women are educated, there is reduced infant mortality, maternal mortality rate,

reduced fertility rate, enhanced family health and nutritional states as well as improved educational attainment of children (Okeke, 2001). Despite these advantages, the girl-child education is yet to occupy its rightful position.

Hence the need for studies of this nature that will present the true picture of girl child school enrolment in Niger State and the reasons advanced by stakeholders.

Theoretical Perspective

Though this research did not use fully the techniques of a participant observer or a participant as observer in the sociological or anthropological field work, it was largely guided by Max Weber's principle of *Verstehen*. The German sociologist Max Weber (1804 – 1930) argued that if social scientists are to understand the behaviour of individuals or groups, they must learn to put themselves into place of the subject of inquiry (Nachmias and Nachmias 1992).

With *Verstehen* as a barometer, this paper tries to understand what went on in the minds of individual stakeholders that led them to the kinds of action that portray apathy for, and negligence of the girl child education. As a systematic and rigorous method for studying thoughts and actions, *verstehen* has greater advantage than the positivistic methods. The advantage lies in the fact that the subjects are fellow human beings, the social scientist can gain an understanding of what goes on in the subjects minds and why they do what they do (Ritzer, 2003).

Methodology

This research adopted participatory methodology involving the use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD), School Mapping, Transect Walk and Observation. The FGD is essentially targeted at key stakeholders in the provision of basic education at community level. These people include parents, Head/Teachers, pupils, (boys and girls), community leaders and out-of-school children.

An interview schedule was drawn with questions specifically centered on Access and Equity issues as regard attainment of school by the girl child.

The interview method was the principal instrument used in this research because most of the respondents could hardly read or write in English language. Apart from few school teachers and some community leaders who could read and write, most of the stakeholders were illiterate. The use of questionnaire in this situation became inappropriate.

The interview schedule served as a guide for other methods employed in collecting data. The transect walk and school mapping techniques were all guided by the interview schedule.

A total of 30 schools, 10 schools each from three Local Government Areas were randomly selected from among 13 educationally disadvantaged Local

Government Areas in Niger State. These Local Government Areas are Gurara, Borgu and Mashegu. Out of the 10 schools selected from each of these Local Government Areas, three of them were Junior Secondary Schools with the remaining seven Primary Schools randomly selected from the over twenty (20) primary schools from each respective Local Government Area. These schools were selected from among semi-urban and rural areas. The Junior Secondary Schools mostly located at semi-urban centers were included in the research to take care of the current universal Basic Education policy in the country, which incorporated Junior Secondary School into basic education.

Method of Data Collection

One of methods of data collection used was school mapping method. Here fifteen (15) pupils were selected to draw the map of their school indicating existing structures and including facilities that were lacking in such schools at locations of their choice. The pupils were also asked questions on access and equity issues regarding those new structures they proposed. These pupils (boys and girls) participated in this mapping in a very relaxed atmosphere.

Again, a transect walk was conducted across one major road of the community. This research was conducted with a key informant in every community who was either the Head teacher, Principal or any other person conversant with the community very well. The idea behind such walk was to capture out of school children to get their views at first hand level, on why they were out of school. Reasons advanced by these out of school children could also be used to evaluate the veracity of the stories of their parents and other stakeholders.

Triangulation methods of data collection were used since there is a great advantage in triangulating methods whenever feasible, that is, using more than one form of data collection to test the same hypothesis (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

However, in line with qualitative research principles, quantitative analyses were avoided as much as possible. Most of the responses of all the stakeholders were coded and summarized in words to avoid unnecessary use of tables and figures. Observation method was therefore used to be able to reap from its advantages of studying behaviours as they occur in their natural settings which would also facilitate the analysis of contextual backgrounds of some of these behaviours. Emphasis was however given to the views of the subjects of the research who are also called stakeholders.

Method of Data Analysis

Most of the data collected were analyzed via coding and summary methods. Since the data came from interviews and were qualitative in nature, they were coded to be able to get either majority or minority views on issues.

Where necessary, verbatim statements of respondents were used to authenticate the analysis. Where the use of figures became necessary, simple percentages were used. Gender trend with regard to pupil enrolment was tabulated to make the analysis succinct.

DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

Structural Access

For the purpose of this analysis, access is sub-divided into two dimensions: structural and cultural. Structural access entails access to educational structures such as class rooms, furniture, toilet facilities, etc. The cultural dimension of access, represents that access to education that emanates out of socio-economic and cultural beliefs of the people.

However, in most of the communities where this research was conducted, especially in the rural areas they have one primary school each which was not adequate. Also where there were structures in terms of Primary School, Classrooms were inadequate. There were little or no furniture in all schools across the three Local Government Areas with some of the pupils taking their lessons under tree shades or on bare floor.

The Manigi School communities, for example were emphatic when they stated that classrooms were inadequate. About, 6 out of the 13 classes in the school operated under tree shades outside. There were no class and office furniture in the school and about 40% of the 638 pupil's population sat on bare floor to take lessons. This explains why in different schools visited, all the stakeholders were unanimous in saying that classrooms and furniture were their uppermost priorities.

Again, about 70% of the schools involved in this research have no toilet facilities. Where they exist, they were mainly used by boys and male teachers as the case may be. Gender issue was not taken into consideration. Girls in Day Secondary School Gawu, Kaboji, Ibbi and Wawa complained of dominance of few available toilets in schools by (boys) and male teachers. In the area of sports, emphasis is placed on boys. Most schools have football pitches and volley ball courts, but these were mainly used by boys even though girls expressed interest in games. Only at Adogo, Jemaku, Malale Doro Primary Schools do there exist separate field for girls. Emirate Secondary School, Mashegu has sport facilities for both sexes, but there were very few girls in the school.

The locations of schools especially in the rural areas pose great difficulty for easy access for some members of these communities. Some of the schools were not located near some of the villages that were supposed to send their kids

to them. For instance, in Borgu Local Government Area, except for Waziri and Nasarawa Primary Schools that were situated at the hearts of the towns, other remaining eight (8) schools have between 7 – 9 km average distances from the communities. School distance serves as an impediment for the enrolment into and retention of girl child at schools.

Cultural Access

Poverty, hawking, early marriage and farming are commonly identified factors responsible for many out of school children in all the communities in the research. Parents Teacher Associations (PTAs) and community leaders in most schools, 60% of who complained of being poor and as a result, affect the enrolment of children and attendance. In general, poverty is a strong factor that affects enrolment, retention and completion of schooling. Manguwat and Dimka (2006) reported that poverty serves as a great impediment for the enrolment and retention of girl child in school.

The chief victim of parents' poverty which affect enrolment and retention, in schools, is the girl child. Out of the 13,716 pupils in all the 30 schools involved in the research across the three Local Government Areas, only 5,974 (43%) were girls. While Gurura has the highest girls-child enrolment with 3,597, perhaps due to its proximity to Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and dominance of Christianity in some parts, the Local Government Area with the lowest girl-child enrolment is Mashegu with 3%.

Table 1: GENDER TREND IN SCHOOL ENROLMENT

S/NO.	SCHOOL	NO. OF MALE	NO. OF FEMALE	TOTAL
1	Baban Rami Primary School	447 (80%)	80 (20%)	557
2	Central Primary School, Adogo	228 (69%)	102 (31%)	330
3	Ibbi Primary School	198 (60%)	171 (40%)	329
4	Faje Primary School	130 (60%)	84 (40%)	214
5	Kulho Primary School	114 (67%)	56 (33%)	170
6	Manigi Primary School	490 (76%)	148 (24%)	638
7	Jemaku Primary School	53 (65%)	28 (35%)	81
8	Emirate J.S.S. Mashegu	190(97%)	5(3%)	195
9	G.J.S.S. Kaboji	67 (84%)	12(2%)	79
10	J.S.S. Ibbi	125 (81%)	29 (19%)	154
	TOTAL	2042(74%)	715(26%)	2,747

Other cultural factors that prevented the girl child from going to school are hawking, early marriage and the parents' ignorance of the value of girl child

education. While parents in Gurura Local Government maintained that "we cannot put all children in school because of lack of money, we need some to assist us on the farm", parents in Mashegu Local Government believe "farming, cultural and religious beliefs, hawking and early marriage" are factors responsible for more girls dropping out of school. Common issues across all stakeholders on gender access and equity is that boys attend school more often than girls in the ratio 7:3 for reasons which include early marriage, hawking and domestic works. Maguwat and Dimka, (2006), Tal and Dambe (2006) all attested to this fact.

The absence of what the people of Mashegu referred to as "role model" in terms of female teachers or workers from the community is another salient factor that stands between the girl child and education. By March, 2005 when data for this research was collected, Mashegu town, the Headquarters of Mashegu Local Government had neither a single indigene female teacher nor Civil servant of any sort. This discourages girls as there was nobody of their type to look up to, said a community leader. Alhaji Shuaib Mashegu, the Principal, Emirata Secondary School and a community leader philosophically said "we have food, but we don't have eaters, only strangers come to eat our food here". He was referring to dearth of female teachers or workers (role models) in Mashegu town.

Summary and Conclusion

While structural and cultural dimensions of access have both affected the girl child, the structural access affects her most when she has already been enrolled in school. Only in Borgu Local Government did structural access pose great threat to the girl child education before enrolment as some of them have to trek about to 9km distance daily to get to school. This becomes a hindrance for the girls.

Socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, hawking, poverty, farming and absence of role models as in the case of Mashegu, are major factors that represent the cultural dimension of Access problem. These factors are the major ones that discourage parents from sending their children and their wards especially the girl child to school.

A noticeable trend in the research is that enrolment of girl child into school and her retention in the system has direct bearing on the size and population of the village. The more rural a settlement is, the less the number of girl child enrolled in school, while urbanization encourages school enrolment of both sexes.

Recommendations

The governments at all levels should fund education properly such that the funding of primary/basic schools should not be left in the hands of Local Governments alone. At least the states and the federal government should

effectively monitor programmes on Primary Schools as carried out by Local Government Councils.

Government should ensure that school management involves also the communities concerned. This will not only give them sense of belonging but will also ensure the security of available infrastructures.

Poverty alleviation programmes should be extended to the rural areas.

Economically empowered parents should be encouraged to enlist their children in schools.

Aggressive sensitization drive should be embarked upon by the government, on the value of girl child education, using female models.

More schools should be established near settlements and more female relate facilities provided. The girl child should not only have free and compulsory basic education, all instructional materials should be provided.

References

- Adamu M. (1998) Cited in Yoloye and Osiyale, (1998) Nigeria Education in the next Century, Lagos, Fafunwa Foundation.
- Dewey C. (1953) quoted in Haralambos and Holborn (2004) Sociology Themes and Perspective, London. Herper Vollins Publishers
- Durkheim E. (1961) quoted in Haralambos and Holborn (2004) Sociology: Themes and Perspective. London: Herper Collins publishers.
- Haralambos & Holborn (2004). Sociology: Themes and Perspective. London: Herper Collins.
- Ipaye, B. (1996), The Fafunwa Phenomenon in Nigeria Education Lagos: Fafunwa Education Foundation.
- Maduwesi, E.J. (1998), "Primary Education in Nigeria in the next century" in Yoloye and Osiyale (1998). Nigeria Education in the Next Century. Lagos.
- Manguwat S.E. and Dimka E.S. (2006). Poverty in the Society: Implications for the Education of the Nigerian Girl child. The Belt Journal of Education in Nigeria: Minna
- Nachmias, C.F. and Nachmias, D. (1992). Research Methods in the Social Sciences. Great Britain: St, Martin's press, Inc.
- National Policy on Education (FGN) 1977, 1981, 1998.
- Nwagwu, N.A (1998). "E J. Maduwesi Primary Education in the Next Century : A reaction," Nigeria Education in the next Century. Lagos: Fafuwa Education Foundation.
- Okeke E (2001) Cited in Tal P. and Dembe N. (2006). The Belt Journal of Education in Nigeria. Minna: COEASU North Central.

- Ritzer, G. (2003). *Contemporary Sociological Theory and its Classical roots: The Basics*. Newyork: McGraw – Hill Higher Education.
- Schafer, R.T. (2005). *Sociology*. Newyork: Mc Graw Hill Higher Education.
- Tal P. and Dambe N. (2006). *Poverty Implication for Teaching as a proposition in Nigeria*. *The Belt Journal of Education in Nigeria*, Minna, COEASU North Central. .