

ROLE OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN PROMOTING GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Girl child education is highly valued not only in Nigeria but across the globe. Statistically, the majority of illiterates worldwide are women, and this trend is also prevalent in northern Nigeria, where 65% of enrolled children are boys, leaving a significant number of girls out of school. This paper delves into the factors influencing girls' education in northern Nigeria, as well as the societal benefits of educating girls. It reviews international literature on this topic and applies it to the situation in northern Nigeria. The study concludes that despite efforts made by various governments, including Nigeria's, to ensure sufficient educational opportunities for all, a noticeable gap persists. Additionally, in the North, this situation notably impacts generational upbringing and moral training. In response to these challenges, seven recommendations are proposed for a collaborative effort between the formal and non-formal sectors to eradicate illiteracy in our society.

Keywords: "Role", Non-Formal Education, Promoting, Girl-Child

Introduction

Education stands as a pivotal social institution shaping and upholding societal structure (Arikpo & Atemie, 2016). It's defined as the process wherein young adults cultivate abilities, attitudes, and behaviors beneficial to their society (Fafunwa, 1974). This concept of education holds significant sway within society, recognized in Nigeria as an unparalleled tool for national development (FRN, 2013). The pursuit of excellence in education is universally acknowledged as the optimal approach in teaching and learning, promoting superior teaching strategies that foster enhanced scholarship (Ololube & Ubogu, 2018; Abdulkarim & Mamman, 2014).

Given the importance of education, various delivery methods have been devised to make it accessible to all. Non-formal education is one such delivery pattern, defined as organized educational activities conducted outside the formal schooling system, catering to specific groups within the population, both adults and children (Ossai, 2021). It encompasses diverse learning experiences, spanning adult education, apprenticeship systems, continuing education, in-service programs, on-the-job training, professional development, industrial training, and extension education. Extension education, a facet of non-formal education, encompasses initiatives like cooperative extension programs, extramural classes, external degree programs, outreach and off-campus educational endeavors, including weekend and sandwich courses.

Moreover, it embraces community development education such as rural development training, manpower resource training, youth camps, holiday programs, mass obligation campaigns, and community health education. Non-formal education also covers short-term learning activities like conferences, evening classes, seminars, workshops, as well as specialized purpose programs like functional literacy initiatives, volunteer youth programs, skill acquisition, and liberal education classes, akin to "living room" or leisure education. It encompasses correspondence courses, home study, self-study programs, media communication education, and open media courses, among others (Ossai, 2021).

Non-formal education is designed to encompass diverse functional education opportunities offered to youths and adults beyond formal schooling systems, embracing areas such as functional literacy, remedial, and vocational education (FRN, 2013). In essence, as highlighted by Ololube & Ubogu (2018), non-formal education signifies an "alternative to schooling," recognized as "out of school education" in certain spheres. This broad category spans from apprenticeships to national mass literacy initiatives and extends to vocational training, such as craft centers and girls' vocational training programs prevalent in numerous developed and developing nations, specializing in skills like sewing, preparing young women for marriage, and nurturing small business ventures.

Non-formal education primarily imparts training to learners focused on particular skills or trades, involving less intensive and rigorous mental activity. It includes various skills acquisition and apprenticeship programs as prime examples. Because of the differences in skills to be acquired, the assessment process will also differ.

Nigeria is currently facing a number of human security challenges – poverty, social unrest, hunger, disease, conflict, marginalization, and the need to meet targets for the 2015, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Ololube, 2012). According to the Human Right Report (UNDP 1994), in order to address these growing challenges, a new development paradigm is called for, one that will put people at the center of development with regards to economic growth, protecting the life opportunities of future as well as current generations, and respecting the national systems of which all life depends. To this end, education is one of the social institutions that contributes to the construction and maintenance of social order and progress (Ololube & Ubogu 2018).

The initiation of the girl-child education program by the Federal Republic of Nigeria's government in 1970 arose due to the escalating levels of illiteracy prevalent in developing nations, particularly Nigeria. This concern led to a recognition within developmental circles of the need to involve women in the national development process. Nigeria, being Africa's most populous country, faces similar challenges regarding a high number of illiterate women, especially in its northern regions, where socio-economic and cultural practices hinder female development. Successive Nigerian governments have devised numerous policies and programs to ensure that Nigerian girls receive education, which is considered fundamental for their functionality in society and aligns with the Child's Right Act, as outlined by UNICEF (1999).

Historically, the development of girl-child education in Nigeria witnessed the female child being consistently marginalized in terms of school enrollment, attendance, completion, and transition to higher education, particularly in the northern regions (Abdulkarim and Mamman, 2014). Nigeria lags behind in combating illiteracy compared to countries like Cuba, Norway, Poland, Holy See, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Barbados, among others, which have achieved a 100% literacy rate. Nigeria was among the E-9 nations projected to struggle to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with literacy rate being one of the indicators for this categorization. Estimates for Nigeria's literacy rate in 2004 showed 76.8% for males and 62.2% for females. The Gender Equality Education Index remained below 60% from 1993 to 2003 (UNICEF, 2005). Nigeria has actively engaged in agreements with other nations to eliminate gender stereotyping and improve access and the quality of girl-child education. There have been noticeable positive trends, such as a 28% increase in girls' enrollment, an 80% reduction in dropout rates, a 5% decrease in the gender gap, and a 40% rise in the number of female teachers in targeted schools (UNESCO 2012).

The Girl-Child Education

The term "girl-child," as defined by UNICEF, denotes a female human below the age of 18. The concept of "education" varies in definition among authors, each offering distinct perspectives based on their intent or viewpoint. Adeyemo (2005) broadly defines education as encompassing the experiences shaping individuals from birth to death. Farrant regards it as the process of learning to become a valued and contributing member of one's community. Alban Winter extends this, defining it as the holistic development of an individual's physical, mental, and spiritual capacities to serve both divine intent and society. Additionally, Okeke (2000) views girl-child education as empowering young girls to recognize their potential and explore their environment.

Girl-child education aims to provide equal opportunities for women to access knowledge, skills, and participation in society alongside their male counterparts. Adeyemo (2005) further specifies education as fostering a person's comprehensive development—physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. In the context of this paper, education is any structured learning experience intended for individuals under 18, preparing them to become productive members of their society. For example, as stated by the Federal Ministry of Education (2009), Nigeria, during the World Summit for Children, education is perceived as the formal schooling program for all school-age girls, ensuring they receive quality learning experiences.

Nonetheless, education in the non-formal sector is designed for out-of-school girls, providing them with opportunities to catch up on missed schooling or gain vocational skills to enhance their economic prospects. Sometimes, these programs focus solely on literacy, providing a gateway to further learning. In essence, girl-child education encompasses educational initiatives offering fair and unhindered opportunities for girls to enroll, attend, and successfully complete their education, devoid of discrimination.

Girl-child education in Nigeria: the Journey so far

It's worth noting that the Federal Ministry of Education in Nigeria presented a proposal to the National Council on Education (NCE) concerning female education. During a meeting held in Kaduna in 1986, the following policy objectives were endorsed:

- i. Expanding educational opportunities for girls, ranging from primary school to tertiary levels.
- ii. Promoting awareness among all citizens that educational opportunities should be accessible regardless of gender, age, location, creed, or status.
- iii. Redirecting females of all ages towards educational pursuits.
- iv. Providing basic literacy skills for illiterate females (including girls) and early school leavers through training in various skills such as sewing, cooking, baking, typing, knitting, crocheting, tatting, tie/dye, batik, and subsistence agriculture.
- v. Cultivating a positive self-image among all women through heightened awareness.
- vi. Educating parents and the general public to alter attitudes towards women's education programs.
- vii. Encouraging female education in the fields of science, technology, and mathematics.

Concept of Non-formal Education

Non-formal education encompasses structured and planned processes aimed at providing personal and social education to young and adult individuals, enhancing various skills and competencies beyond the formal educational framework. It occurs within settings like youth organizations, sports clubs, drama and community groups, where individuals engage in collaborative projects, games, discussions, camping, music, and drama activities. Though non-formal education achievements often lack formal certification, their societal acknowledgement is gradually increasing. Key characteristics of non-formal education include being voluntary, accessible to everyone, organized with educational objectives, participatory, learner-centered, focused on life skills, preparing for leadership roles, involving individual and group learning, adopting a collective approach, holistic and process-oriented, rooted in experience and action (European Youth Foundation, 2021).

Models of Non-formal Education

Various models of non-formal education often emerge from specific societal needs and aims, tailored to address the prevailing circumstances and priorities. Arikpo & Atemie (2016) highlighted several models:

The Agricultural Extension Model: This stands as one of the oldest and most widespread non-formal education models practiced in Nigeria. Its primary objective revolves around boosting food production by introducing improved farming techniques. Facilitators in this model include agricultural extension officers, while the target audience comprises rural farmers and cooperative societies. Extension officers function as agents of change, identifying agricultural requirements within diverse

communities. They then collaborate with farmers and cooperatives, devising strategies to address these needs and enhance agricultural practices.

The Apprenticeship Model stands as one of the oldest and most widespread methods for skill acquisition. Governments and employers have consistently utilized this approach for non-formal occupational education. In Nigeria, programs such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), skill acquisition initiatives, and vocational training programs like school-to-land schemes have exemplified this model.

The Age-Group Model represents a traditional African approach to non-formal education, fostering interaction among peers within the same age range. This model emphasizes community activities to instill social obligations, rules, and fundamental skills, enabling youths to function responsibly in society.

The Self-Help Model focuses on local skills and materials, promoting self-reliance and industry. Community leaders and chairs of Community Development Committees (CDC) often facilitate this model, assisting communities, particularly youths, in identifying needs and organizing projects to address them.

The Sunday School Model extends beyond religious and moral teachings, occasionally offering practical skills like cookery, home management for girls, and music theory or other trades for boys. Some churches provide training in various roles like organists, choir-masters, and youth leaders through Sunday school programs.

The Training Institute Model offers on-the-job training in work environments to enhance participants' occupational competence. These programs, conducted by industries, organizations, or governments, aim to improve specific job-related skills, such as farm training centers or management and job orientation centers.

The Village Craft Centre Model, initiated by local government authorities or community development agencies, imparts practical skills to rural youths, encouraging self-employment and discouraging rural-urban migration. It promotes hard work, creativity, and the dignity of labor, teaching trades like masonry, sewing, carpentry, and plumbing.

The Basic Literacy Education Model, organized by Local Government Authorities (LGAs) or voluntary agencies, teaches fundamental literacy skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic (3Rs)—through adult education or night classes. It caters to groups like migrant fishermen or nomadic populations.

The Community Mobilization Model, conducted by community development experts, aims to transform rural communities through liberal education and counseling, focusing on uplifting the community's mindset from debilitating conditions.

The Enrichment-of-Skills Model encourages responsible and creative leisure activities to enrich individuals' minds constructively, promoting personal development through engaging leisure pursuits.

Importance of Non-formal Education

Education significantly contributes to development, particularly through out-of-school programs that offer adaptable learning opportunities and new skills for individuals outside the formal education system (Ololube & Ubogu, 2018). Non-formal education emerged in global educational discussions during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this context, it represents any organized educational activities outside the formal system, operating either independently or as part of a broader activity aimed at serving specific learning objectives and clients. Today, non-formal education is closely associated with the concepts of recurrent and lifelong learning. Issah (2012) highlighted four key characteristics of non-formal education:

- i. Relevance to the needs of disadvantaged groups.
- ii. Focus on specific categories of individuals.
- iii. Emphasis on clearly defined purposes.
- iv. Flexibility in organization and methods.

As per UNESCO (2010), non-formal education plays a crucial role in ensuring equal access to education, eradicating illiteracy among women, and enhancing their access to vocational training, science, technology, and continuous education. It also promotes nondiscriminatory education and training, allocates resources for educational reforms, and advocates for lifelong education for women and girls. The impacts and aspects of literacy and education, particularly concerning girls and women, are noteworthy:

Health Development: Adult literacy and education among young women are pivotal for their healthy physical and intellectual development. The effectiveness of such programs is enhanced by family, community, and parental involvement (Russell, 2021).

Education of Parents: Education of parents, especially mothers, leads to substantial reductions in infant mortality rates and improves child healthcare. Well-educated parents are more likely to raise literate children. Addressing low school enrollment in pastoral communities, which arises from parental fears about education diverting children from traditional lifestyles, can be mitigated by offering non-formal and distance education for parents (Arikpo & Atemie, 2016).

Human and Economic Development: Enhanced literacy levels yield economic benefits for individuals, communities, and nations. Studies reveal a correlation between literacy rates and per capita economic growth, leading to poverty reduction. Bangladesh, among the E-9 countries, has initiated a recent non-formal education project for human development that focuses on skills training and income generation to alleviate poverty. Encouraging all sectors concerned with human development and economic growth to support non-formal education is vital for national interest (John, 2017). Nigeria could replicate this model to boost economic development.

Preventing HIV/AIDS: Adult literacy programs significantly contribute to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS by effectively communicating key prevention messages. For instance, Uganda reduced HIV/AIDS prevalence from 14% in the early 1990s to about 41% in 2003, partly attributed to information campaigns educating Ugandans about HIV/AIDS and self-protection (Russell, 2021).

Several African countries require formal and/or non-formal education and training to access basic healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health services. Equipping people with education and skills helps combat diseases that disproportionately affect impoverished populations (Joh, 2017).

Benefits of girls' education to the society

The advantages of educating girls encompass several crucial areas:

- i. **Child Training:** Women, as primary caregivers, play a fundamental role in child rearing. Educated mothers tend to provide more effective initial training to their children. Educated women are often more adept at instilling good behavior and adherence to community norms compared to those without formal education.
- ii. **Supporting Child Education:** Educated mothers tend to actively engage in and support their children's education. They often assist their children with homework and actively participate in their educational journey, positively influencing their academic performance.
- iii. **Health and Sanitation:** Education contributes to better health practices. Educated women are more likely to understand and implement hygiene and sanitation practices learned during their education, fostering a healthier environment for their families.
- iv. **Moral Training:** Educated women often serve as role models and moral guides due to their enriched knowledge and practical experiences gained from their schooling. In societies where moral decay is on the rise, educated mothers are better equipped to impart moral values to their children.
- v. **Economic Empowerment:** Education significantly impacts an individual's economic growth. Educated women are more likely to secure employment or start their own businesses, contributing to the economic development of their communities and the nation. Their income often supports family needs and effective resource management at home, positively influencing the household economy and, consequently, the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Empowering women through education not only benefits the individual but also contributes to the overall well-being and progress of the society and the nation.

Conclusion

Education is an indispensable tool for personal growth and national progress. However, relying solely on the elitist and discriminatory formal education system limits individuals from achieving holistic development. Concepts like continuing education, recurrent education, and lifelong learning underscore the need for education to extend throughout one's life. Non-formal education stands as a vital avenue, catering to the educational needs of all Nigerian citizens, including the girl-child, bridging the gap left by the formal system.

A nation that predominantly invests in youth and formal education inadvertently neglects the optimal development and utilization of its human resources. Nigeria's persistent challenges with poverty and unemployment, despite its abundant natural resources, are largely due to the absence of an education system that equips

individuals to contribute meaningfully to various aspects of societal, economic, political, and cultural development. To elevate national competitiveness and ensure sustainable development, a coherent non-formal education policy intertwined with development objectives, especially regarding girl-child education, is imperative.

Recommendations

1. Establishing non-formal education centers across all states to impart life planning skills, leveraging proximity to benefit grassroots communities.
2. Encouraging Christian-majority areas to mandate Sunday school attendance, recognizing its role in teaching vital life skills and ethical values.
3. Supporting non-formal education programs in prisons, providing post-release resources and equipment to facilitate productive engagement upon completion of sentences.
4. Ensuring the provision of Vocational Guidance Counselors to assist individuals in making informed lifelong career decisions at different life stages.
5. Creating girl-child friendly learning facilities such as skills acquisition centers, ICT laboratories, and vocational training sites like hair salons and tailoring facilities.

These recommendations, if implemented, can significantly contribute to the holistic development and empowerment of individuals, especially the girl-child, fostering a more robust and inclusive educational framework in Nigeria.

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