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SENSITIZATION AND AWARENESS ON IMPORTANCE OF GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the concept of education, significant roles of counseling service, concept of girl-child, importance of education, girl-child education in Northern part of Nigeria, government policies on girl-child education, culture and girl-child education in Nigeria, importance of girl-child education, challenges of girl-child education in Nigeria, strategies for promoting girl-child education in Nigeria, implications for counseling, conclusion as well as recommendations were made to promote girl-child education in Nigeria such as: Governments should prioritize girls' education through allocation of adequate funds, develop strategic plan to implementing inclusive policies, and monitor progress so as to promote quality girl-child in education. School managements/guidance counsellor should collaborate with School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) to provide safe and secured learning environments, provide facilities, train and re-train to enhance quality of girl-child. Community-based organizations such as old boys, women associations, students' associations and other related advocacy groups should rise to create awareness, and providing support to implement girl-child education initiatives in our societies.

KEY WORDS: Sensitization, Girl-child education and Counselling

Introduction

Education is the process of inculcating knowledge, skills, experiences, values, norms, and character traits in the minds of others. Education could be formal or non-formal. The formal education takes place in an organised complex institutional framework, like primary, secondary schools while non-formal education is structured but takes place outside the formal schooling system. Education is vital for fighting poverty and is a sustainable way to build a better future. The fight against poverty and strive for a sustainable future development is gender friendly. Quality education provides better opportunities and reduces chance to escape poverty and to be oppressed. Therefore, educating a girl-child has a higher chance of benefiting her parents and other family members, and the society at large.

Though, educating the girl-child in Northern part of Nigeria is a challenging task. The challenges here are culturally inclined. Based on our culture, we believe that educating a girl-child will not benefit her parents and other family members rather it is for the benefit of her husband and his relatives. The Northern culture does give much priority to women when talking of family issues and family affairs. Though, today family socio-economic status makes some parents to educate the male-child in the expense of their female counterparts. Low socio-economic status pushed many families to be unable to afford school fees and a lot of girls are not enrolled in school while some are even forced to drop out of school for early marriage.

Counselling Services is very important in our schools coupled with the recent anti-social behaviours among our youths and school children. The services also address the issue of maladaptive behaviours such as academic backwardness, school drop-out, stereotype, discrimination, and denial quality education, personal social and vocational.

Counselling services play significant roles in providing girl-child access to quality education, it is empowering them with knowledge, skills, and opportunities to grow and reach their full potential. Education generally empowered the girl-child to challenge traditional gender roles,

advocate for their rights, and contribute to a more equitable and development of the society. More so, it prepares and equips them with essential health skills and hygiene, contributing financially, makes positive decisions about their psychological well-being and that of the society as a whole. Education is a tool that provides equal opportunities for learning, minimises the rampage early marriage and foster the family and societal development. According to Ibrahim (2023), education offers girls the necessary skills and information needed to excel in a chosen career in future.

Hence, a girl who is educated can grow to become a teacher, architect, Medical doctor, computer scientist, lawyer and pharmacist, among other lucrative and noble professions and that by giving girls a right to education we can be able to right the wrongs in our society. For the purpose of this paper, the paper is focus on following concepts: who is a girl-child, education, girl-child education, policies on girl-child education, culture and girl-child education in Nigeria, importance and challenges of girl-child education as well as strategies for promoting girl child education in Nigeria. Finally, suggestions are made to promote girl-child education in our community.

Girl-Child

The girl-child is an unmarried female defined by age, psychological, anatomical as well as physiological characteristics that differentiate her from the male counterpart. As a compound noun, the term "girl-child" connotes the sex and age bracket of 0-18. A girl-child is the age of female before she becomes young adult. According to Offorma (2009), a girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age as this period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0-5 years), primary (6-12 years) and secondary school (12-18 years).

Education

Education is the process in which people acquires knowledge, skills, experiences, abilities, values, norms, character traits and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self-

actualization, to be useful to herself and others within the society. Education can be described as preserving, processing, instilling, and improving the culture, norms and values of the society. Offorma (2009) described education as a process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). Education is not just limited to a western or religious education but a life orientation (Ibrahim, 2023). However, the following according to Puri (2016) are importance of education to women:

1. Economic Prosperity: Education is the fundamental instrument of change available to women to empower themselves to come forward to ensure their own prosperity and contribute towards economic development of their immediate family and the larger society.

2. Economic Empowerment: As stated above, real time change in the condition of women in the society is not possible so long they remain backward and economically dependent on men. Economic empowerment comes with economic independence after securing employment which is again dependent on education qualification and experiences.

3. Right to Considered Choice of Profession: It has been amply proved that educated women can be as successful as men in almost every sphere of life. Giving the girl-child equal opportunity for education will help her to plan to become a successful professional in whatever field she chooses to be in.

4. Improved Life: Education enables a woman to live a good life and preserve her identity as an individual. She can then ensure that her rights shall never get trampled. Thus, a society that has a broader outlook regarding female education can secure an improved life for its women.

5. Improved Health: Education will impart in women awareness about the importance of basic health and hygiene. Proper health education will greatly empower women to lead a healthy life-

style. Women's education has a multiplier effect because an educated mother can take good care of her babies and also care for the welfare of the family as a unit.

6. Role Model: Educated women are looked upon with dignity and honour by millions of young girls as role-models to follow, in shaping their future. They can inspire a whole generation of young women to tread in their footsteps to make it big in life and leave a mark for their juniors to emulate.

7. Gender Justice: Educated women are more informed about the rights of women for justice. They are better equipped to raise their voices with conviction about gender discrimination in society especially in workplaces, violence against women and against various maladies like female foeticide, child-marriage, dowry, trafficking in girls, forced prostitution and other instances of injustice meted out to their less educated compatriots.

8. Poverty Alleviation: Women's education goes a long way to alleviate poverty of the masses. Educated women have been found to have inspired various successful schemes of poverty alleviation like forming women's self-help groups, women's cooperative ventures in dairy farming and the likes in rural areas. These experiences suggest that women's education can positively impact poverty alleviation in the society.

9. Better Parenting: The educated woman has the skills, information and self-confidence that are essentially needed to be a better parent. Psychologically a child in his/ her formative years is normally more attached to the mother who has a profound influence on shaping the child's personality. An educated mother, therefore, can play a discerning role in grooming her child to be a better citizen in every way.

10. Demographic Advantages: Following factors that have come to light as a result of various studies on women's education, point to the benefits a society derives for having an educated female population.

Girl-Child Education

Girl-child education is the education for female children from 0-18 years old. The education is concerned with ensuring girls have access to quality education, safety and secured in the school, and gain the opportunity to complete all levels of education with adequate knowledge and the necessary skills to compete in the labour market. Also, quality girl-child education involves teaching girls biopsychosocial, socio-emotional and life skills, empowering them to make decisions about their own lives, and enabling them to contribute to their communities and the world. Gomwalk (1996) defines girl-child education as the knowledge and skills given to the girl-child in the formal school setting to enable her to advance her status knowledge for interaction, self-improvement and status advancement.

Onyeanisi (2019) viewed girl-child education as a process through which the young girl acquires knowledge, skills and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, economic benefits and to be useful to her society and others. According to Ocho in Onyeanisi (2019), Girl-child education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, politically, and economically. Girl-child education to Meeme (2023) is the aspect of education that promote skill and knowledge of girls and women from all cases, cultures, races, and backgrounds adding that ensuring access to quality education for girls is essential for their personal growth, empowerment, and the overall development of their family and society.

Policies on Girl-Child Education

Many policies have been put in place to ensure every child is educated irrespective of gender. According to Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2021) formulated national policy on gender in education and its implementation in 2021 to ensure equitable access for girls and promotes quality and inclusive education for all. The Federal Government of Nigeria embraces and reaffirms the UBE policy of free and compulsory basic education for all children, boys and

girls, as a fundamental human right for all citizens and will assist all states in the enactment and enforcement of the UBE Act. Through the UBE Act, Government at all levels will support State Governments to improve the provision of child/girl-friendly school infrastructures which will be characterized by among other provisions; adequate and well-furnished classroom blocks, separate toilets for girls and boys, clean water supply, access to adequate teaching and learning materials, fences around the school, community involvement including mothers in school management, regular inspection of schools (FRN, 2006).

The Federal Government of Nigeria encourages State Governments to establish Girls' Second Chance Education Centers, where girls who dropped out of school can continue learning academic subjects, as well as specific technical skills and to provide adequate restructuring of such facilities including provisions of equipment and of facilitators' salaries (FRN, 2006). According to FRN (2006), the Federal Government of Nigeria encourages State Governments in collaboration with development partners, School Based Management Committees (SBMC), and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), to establish innovative Girls' Encouragement Clubs in schools; these clubs will focus on leadership skills, building self-esteem and improving girls' performance among other activities. Also, FRN (2006) encourages State Governments to enact and enforce state policies and laws which among others issues address the following allow girls who drop out of school due to pregnancies or other causes to continue with education, prohibit girl-child marriages or child betrothal and enforce laws against sexual abuse and exploitation of children.

Culture and Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

In North part of Nigeria, the parents prefer to invest in the education of the male child who will in the future marry and bear the father's name. According to Oyigbenu (2010), the girl-child, and indeed women the world over, especially in Africa and Nigeria has had their destiny sealed from birth by tradition and culture on account of their biological sex; they have been called the

weaker sex in order to justify societal discrimination and oppression against them; they must remain silent hewers of wood and drawers of water, bearers of children, and toilers of arduous labour from sun-rise to sun-down as they can be seen but not to be heard in both the private and the public spaces of decision making.

Studies have shown that some religious and cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria impact on the educational aspirations of girl-children (Onochie in Osagiobare et al., 2016). Juma and Simatwa (2014) observe that cultural factors have a significance influence on girl student academic achievement than boys' students. Thus, the girl child is subjected to domestic chores daily in case of day schools. Utulu in Onyeanisi (2019) who notes that traditions have practices that discriminate against the status of girls and women in society and these have negative effects on their psycho-social and educational development. A study by Onyeanisi (2019) revealed that socio-cultural factors significantly influence the girl-child education.

Importance of Girl-Child Education

Understanding the significance of girl-child education, the government and various non-government organizations undertook difference projects to increase women's education. Singh (2023) opined that educating the girls of a nation from the best schools also promotes children's and women's endurance rates and health issues, child marriage, empowers women both at their workplace and also their home, and assist in dealing with climate change. According to Singh (2023), an educated girl can educate their entire family. This is in line with the popular saying "if you educate a male child, you educate one, but if you educate a girl-child, you educate the nation". Ibrahim (2023) asserted that a significant function of the education of the girl-child in Nigeria is that it offers her the opportunity to chart her destiny with the skills and information she acquired from basic education up to tertiary education. He added that the girl-child is provided with diverse basic knowledge, skills, and training which contribute to national development. Girls' education

is like sowing the seed which gives rise to a revitalised, cheerful and full-grown family plant (Puri, 2016).

Generally, Singh (2023) discussed the following importance of girl-child education:

1. Assist in Buildings More Stable Communities: Education offers strength and versatility which allows the nation to improve at a quicker rate from any dispute. The overall quality education can even assist prevent disputes in the first place by giving knowledge on social skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking at the schools. And when the main education is essential to girls and secondary education can be a transformative perspective in their lives.

2. Promote Gender Equality: In today's society, gender equality continues to be a prevalent problem because of the persistent gap in terms of access to chances for women and men. Gender equality is a basic human right that every human being is entitled to regardless of race, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion. The role men and women play in society is completely determined and as a result, there is a gender gap. When girls in our community are more educated, more influence is placed on gender equality. As women get equality, human rights become a powerful value of societies as women in governance tend to fight for underprivileged groups. Women's leadership in government also becomes more prevalent, and when women lead, women push for more impartial rules of governance.

3. Allow Girls to make their Own Decision: Educated girls gave higher courage and independence to make decisions that change their lives. They are better promoted to examine the social imperative that women reside in the home, growing children and doing the regular housework. Education from the best schools in Nigeria and the rest parts of the world enables young women to think beyond cultural standards and continue their desires for a better life.

4. Strengthens Economies and Advances the Fight to End Poverty: One of the clearest and obvious benefits of educating girl child from the best schools in Nigeria is the prospect for the economic development of a country. The similar even affects the country's Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) rate with an increase in women education participation. When women of a country are learned and educated, the whole economy develops and flourishes.

5. Positive Change for Future Generations: The educated girl becomes an educated woman. Offering girls with education is a primary step in developing future generations of healthy, educated, and empowering girls. Educated women of the community can become future leaders, direct towards transformation, and build more powerful and significant societies. And therefore, a nation is regarded only as wealthy because of its citizens.

6. Choice to Opt a Profession of Her Choice: It is one of the importance of girl child education. The educated girls can demonstrate to be strong in their several professions. When the girl child has the chance to be educated it offers her the better opportunity to become a successful engineer, doctor, or the choice of the profession she wishes.

7. Improved Life and Health: Educating girl child assist in the improvement of a good life. The girl can read and learn about her rights. They won't be trodden down about her rights. There will be a general improvement in their life. Educated girls bring an awareness of the importance of health and hygiene. Girl child education is one of the most vital concepts. Every girl in our society must have to be educated because education is the most influential and vital weapon that can be used to solve the difficulties of human lives.

Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

According to Meeme (2023), the following are challenges and barriers to girl child education:

1. Poverty: Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds face financial constraints that limit their access to education.

2. Gender-Based Violence (GBV): Gender-based violence, including child marriage, sexual harassment, and trafficking, poses significant barriers to girls' education.

3. Discrimination and Stereotypes: Deep-rooted gender biases, cultural norms, and stereotypes often hinder girls' access to education and limit their opportunities.

4. Lack of Infrastructure and Resources: Inadequate school facilities, lack of sanitary facilities, and limited learning materials can impact negatively on girls' educational experience.

Similarly, Madu and Obi (2020) discussed the following challenges facing girl-child education in Nigeria:

1. Cultural Influence: A misinterpretation of the traditional norm or even Islamic holy text, the Quran may influence parents to keep their daughters out of school. Even some parents have the misconception that sending their daughters to school will bring about immoral behaviour among them. While some cultures see education of the girl child as a wasted investment. This misconception stems from the view and belief that a girl is often not expected to assume leadership positions in the community and may end up not providing for the family on completion of her education.

2. Sexual Violence and Abuse: Sexual violence and abuse could result in intimidating environments and when in the environment the girl- child may also be unwilling to come to school because of possible abuse that may face them there. Alika et al. (2019), posited a lot of consequences associated with school related violence, among which is sexual violence. Often times, girls often report having feelings of psychological adjustment due to being harassed by their male classmates and teachers.

3. Economic Factors: The economic situation in Nigeria could be seen as not palatable. Nigeria as a nation is undoubtedly characterized by very harsh economic conditions. In the bid to meet up with the harsh economic situations, parents may be faced with the choice of whom to send to school. Most often, it is the girl-child that remains at home, girls get withdrawn from schools so as to help to supplement family income.

4. Fear of Safety of the Girl Child: In rural areas girls often walk many miles before reaching their schools. The walk can take over an hour, which makes the girl child's parents concerned for the safety of their child on the way to school.

5. Poverty: Poverty can be seen as a barrier to girl child education in Nigeria, considering the fact that extreme poverty prevents the education of a girl. Often girls are sent to hawk on the streets. Extreme poverty also can make families unable and unwilling to pay for school necessities such as uniforms and books.

Strategies for Promoting Girl Child Education in Nigeria

Meeme (2023) identified the following to be the strategies for promoting girl child education:

1. Enact Policies and Legislation: Governments should adopt and implement policies that guarantee equal access to education for girls, enforce laws against child marriage and discrimination, and allocate resources for girls' education.

2. Enhance School Infrastructure: Improve and invest in school facilities, including classrooms, libraries, toilets, and clean water sources, to create safe and conducive learning environments for girls.

3. Teacher Training and Support: Provide gender-responsive teacher training programs to address unconscious biases, promote inclusive teaching methods, and create supportive learning environments for girls.

4. Address Socio-Cultural Norms: Raise awareness and engage communities to challenge harmful socio-cultural norms and traditions that impede girls' education, emphasizing the benefits of education for individuals and society.

5. Scholarships and Financial Support: Establish scholarship programs, grants, and financial incentives to assist economically disadvantaged girls in accessing and completing their education.

6. Community Involvement: Engage parents, community leaders, and local organizations to support girls' education, address barriers, and promote girls' enrollment and retention in schools.

7. Technology and Distance Learning: Utilize technology and innovative approaches like online education and distance learning to reach girls in remote areas or during crises.

Implications for counselling

Counselling is an approach of helping which point out the intellectual and emotional experience of a client such as how a client is feeling and what they think on the issues they are seeking help for. Alebiosu, Akintoke and Oginni (2021) opined that counselling is a helping process where one explicitly and purposefully gives his or her time to assist people to explore their own situation, and act on a solution. Therefore, counselling service is a **psychological specialty** that encompasses research and applied work in several broad domains: counselling process and outcome; supervision and training; career development and prevention and health.

Counselling is a learning process in which a counsellor helps an individual or individuals learn, understand themselves and their environment and be in a position to choose the right type of behaviours that will help them develop, grow, progress, ascend, mature and step up, educationally, vocationally and socio personally (Egbule, 2013). Counselling psychologists or Counsellors help people deal with problems and make difficult decisions in various aspects of their lives. It requires a deep understanding of personality, cognition (how we think and make decisions), and communication. Counselling service according to Joshua (2020) is an area of professional services with strong ties to positive outcome. Counselling service is one of the guidance services that aim to help individuals, at any stage in life, overcome mental health challenges in order to improve the quality of living and that this service focuses on how human function in their professional and personal lives. Counselling psychology professionals can hold

many different job titles depending on the type of work they pursue and the location in which they are employed (Tim, 2020.

Conclusion

The benefits of educating girl-child are of two dimensions; for personal and for the society. One may conclude that investing in girl-child education is a step forward for transformative to promote social progress and justice, and building sustainable societies. Putting in place effective strategies to address the barriers can promote educational inclusiveness in an environment where every girl can thrive, fulfil her potential, strive for a brighter future and contribute to overall development of the society. Let all hands be on desk to ensure and empower girls through education so as to create a better prosperous future.

Recommendations

The following are hereby provided to promote quality girl-child education in our community:

1. Governments should prioritize girls' education through allocation of adequate funds, develop strategic plan to implementing inclusive policies, and monitor progress so as to promote quality girl-child in education.
2. School managements/guidance counsellor should collaborate with School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) to provide safe and secured learning environments, provide facilities, train and re-train to enhance quality of girl-child.
3. Guidance counsellors should ensure that parents make girl-child education a priority so as to bridge the cultural values associated to women education in the society.
4. Community-based organizations such as old boys, women associations, students' associations and other related advocacy groups should rise to create awareness, and providing support to implement girl-child education initiatives in our societies.
5. A professional guidance and counsellor should make his/her office functional by rendering guidance and counselling services such as orientation service, information service,

appraisal service, vocational/career service to the school communities, parents and to the students.

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