

IGWEBUIKE AS A COMPLEMENTARY APPROACH TO THE ISSUE OF GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION

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Abstract

A cursory glance at the educational system in Africa reveals that, although a substantial progress has been achieved in the area of girl-child education, however, the disparity in gender education still remains an issue of concern as there are still fewer girls in school than boys. It is this regard that this piece attends to the questions of girl-child education from an African perspective, employing Igwebuiké as an African complementary philosophy, with the purpose of emphasizing the dangerous consequences of poor girl-child education on the whole society. The hermeneutic method of inquiry would be employed for the purpose of this study.

Keywords: Girl-Child, education, Igwebuiké, Philosophy, Education, Africa, Nigeria

Introduction

The declaration that the education of the girl child is a human right has been part of many fundamental documents in human history. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, upholds the right to education as a human rights:

- (1) "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
- (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
- (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children". (26, 1-3).

In a more particular manner, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child also establishes the education of the Girl-Child as a human right:

1. "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:
 - (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
 - (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need;
 - (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means;
 - (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children;
 - (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention.
3. States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries". (18, 1-3).

According to the 1998 Nigeria's National Policy on Education:

1. "Education is meant to be an instrument for the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development and the interaction of persons and ideas.
2. Education is aimed at fostering the worth and development of the individual, for his/her own sake and for the sake of the nation.

3. There is need for the equality of educational opportunities to all Nigerian children, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her abilities.
4. There is need for a functional education for the promotion of a progressive and united Nigeria....” (NPE 40)

With these developments, one can say that a substantial progress has been achieved in the area of girl-child education. It is obvious in many African countries that the enrollment of the girl-child into schools of all levels has improved tremendously. This development notwithstanding, the disparity in gender education still remains an issue of concern as there are still fewer girls in school than boys. It is this regard that this piece attends to the questions of girl-child education from an African perspective, employing Igwebuike as an African complementary philosophy, with the purpose of emphasizing the dangerous consequences of poor girl-child education on the whole society.

Education and the Experience of the Girl-Child

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2007), the ratio of boys to girls in primary education improved from 79% in 2004 to 81% in 2005 while the proportion of women in non-agricultural wage employment stood at 79% in 2005. The proportion of women in national parliament was 5.76% as against 30% target. Secondary school enrolment has increased for both males and females at the tertiary level. From the report of UNICEF (2010), female adult literacy rate between 2003 and 2007 is 80%. A gradual improvement in the proportion of girls enrolled in primary school, though noteworthy, is not yet enough to meet the target of 2015. There are still fewer girls than boys in school. There are signs of backsliding in the number of girls in tertiary education.

At the heart of this is the traditional role society has assigned to the woman: producing and raising babies, cultivation of crops and playing a docile role in the society. However, with the evolution of modern stratification in society, the concept of the role of the woman has been broadened (Joel 2003). Education is one of the basic instruments to empower a woman for the realization of her full potentials. However, this is impeded by a retinue of factors hence a huge number of women still are uneducated.

In Nigeria, there is a high disparity in the literary ratio between men and women, with a greater number of uneducated women in Northern Nigeria, especially Muslim women. There is a literary ratio of only 47% for women and 67% for men (UNESCO 1991 & Mahmood & Nakwe 2003). A couple of factors have formed a combined force against the education of women. These range from early pregnancies, early marriages, poverty, and consideration of female education as secondary to that of boys and certain inhibitive religious practices common in the Northern part of Nigeria (Joel 2003). For those who successfully further their education into the secondary school and university, a couple of factors keep on hunting and limiting their aspirations and learning achievements as girls. Among these is gender stereotyping in school curriculum, which suggests that certain subjects such as the sciences are meant for men while those of arts are feminine. This is the result of women living as the shadows of men in Nigeria, which has created a psychological complex in the mind of the society which thinks that the female gender is meant to play a second role (Fafunwa 2003). Education according to Anyakora and Umanze (2003) is the basis for the promotion and improvement of the condition of women in Nigeria. It is an indispensable tool for the empowerment of the women folk. It is in this regard that Salaam (2003) argues that the lack of education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the Nigerian formal sector.

Igwebuiké as a Basis for Girl-Child Education

The underlying principle of Igwebuiké philosophy is the idea of complementarity (Kanu 2017a&b; 2016). Every segment or dimension of human society is relevant to the complete whole, and to relegate any dimension to the background is to do disfavor to the entire whole. While on traditional grounds, many African societies have not allowed the education of the girl child, it has had adverse effects on the entire African society- it comes with consequences that also affect men; this is because the denial of education to the girl-child limits her in the exercise of her indispensable complementary role to the man. Obviously, educated girls are healthier, that is, they are able to take care of themselves better without being a liability to the society. For instance, women are most vulnerable to trafficking when they are undereducated and poor.

Protection from HIV/AIDS and the enhancement of environmental awareness is linked to education. And more so, through education the chances of women earning higher income becomes more possible, and through this, they are able to

raise their household out of poverty. Being a caring group of humans, educated women are more able to extend care to their children through education and provision of healthcare, and thus child mortality is reduced to a significant level. Children of educated mothers are twice as likely to survive past the age of five. Women with some formal education are more likely to seek medical care, ensure their children are immunized, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices. As a result, their infants and children have higher survival rates and tend to be healthier and better nourished.

The education of the girl-child has consequences on the economy of the country or state, as it can lead to greater economic growth. Infact, the Gross domestic product, better known as GDP, soars when both girls and boys are being offered equal educational opportunities. Being educated, women are able to make their peculiar contributions towards the growth of the economy. This also touches on the area of violence- this is because educated girls and women are less likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence or to tolerate it in their families. As women become more educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism than similarly educated men. This very easy to understand if one takes a look at the educational background of the women who engage in suicide bombing. Politically, educated women are more likely to participate in political discussions, meetings, and decision-making, which in turn promotes a more representative, effective government.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, Igwebuiké posits that the responsibility for the girl-child education is wholistic- it is a responsibility that falls on the shoulder of every member of society, both men and women. The complementary character of Igwebuiké holds that there is power in number, and that when the different dimensions of the group come together to address a particular issue, the group can attain a success that might not have been imagined. Thus, having discussed the problem of girl child education, which is a worldwide issue, Igwebuiké believes that the solution to it must be wholistic: every dimension of society must be actively involved, this is very important as every one shares in the adverse effects. This would include the government, parents, siblings and relations, schools, churches, mosques, etc. These different dimensions of society are complementary. The school complements what parents are doing, the

government complements what the school and family relations are doing, and the church and mosque complement what the school, family and government are doing for the enhancement of the education of the child. While the effort to solve the problem of disparity in educational opportunities is complementary, the consequences are also shared by every member of the society.

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