GIRLS PERCEPTION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND BELIEFS AS IMPEDIMENTS TO GIRLS' SCHOOLING IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how girls perceive socio-cultural practices and beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling in Kwande and Ushongo LGAs of Benue state, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 520 girls was selected randomly from a population of 883 secondary school girls in six Government Secondary Schools for the two LGAs. The instrument of the study was developed by the researchers and validated. It is a structured questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of 0.91 of the instrument was determined by Cronbach alpha procedure. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS IBM-version 20. Research questions were answered using means and standard deviations. The findings of the study showed that girls perceived: withdrawal of girls from school for early marriage, girls are married young or may be defiled, girls work to increase family budget among others, as socio-cultural practices that impede girls' schooling. They also perceived the beliefs that: girls are not future breadwinners or heads of their families, education of a girl ends in the kitchen and a girl will eventually marry outside her family as impediments to girls' schooling. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that governments should make a law prohibiting early marriage and discrimination against girls on the basis of gender.

Keywords: Girls perception, Socio-cultural practices and beliefs, Impediements, Girls' schooling.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-cultural practices and beliefs constitute a serious problem which is preventing many girls from acquiring basic and tertiary education worldwide. More and more governments and non-

governmental organizations worldwide have expressed their concern about the alarming proportions of girls who are not attending schools..

In view of the problem, according to the United Nations (UN) (2000), some targets were set for governments by the Beijing Platform for Action to reduce female illiteracy rate and eliminate gender disparities in access to all areas of higher education by the year 2000, and to close the gender gap in primary and secondary education by the year 2005. The UN reported that some progress was made in some regions, such as in Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), and Southern Asia where enrolment for girls was significantly low but now more girls than boys are enrolled.

The UN report revealed that in 22 countries of Africa and nine countries of Asia, the gender gap between boys and girls is still wide, with data showing enrolment ratios for girls less than 80 percent that of boys. The report added that girls' access to and completion of primary and secondary education are still limited particularly in rural areas, that girls are more likely than boys to drop out of school.

In Nigeria, some evidence shows that there are more boys than girls in primary, post-primary and tertiary institutions particularly in northern parts of the country. According to Nwafor (2002), and Okeke (2002), there are more boys than girls in schools except in the eastern parts of the country where there are more girls than boys in schools, in states like: Anambra, Akwa-Ibom, Enugu, Imo and Rivers. The World Education News (2004), reported that, of seven million Nigerian children of school age who were not attending schools, 62 percent of this figure were girls. The National Population Commission (NPC) (2001) showed that the distribution of illiteracy rate between boys and girls in Benue State aged between 15 years and above was 39.8 percent for boys and 60.2 percent for girls. In a similar vein, Orhungur, Agbe and Egbe-Okpenge (2003), revealed that many girls who were enrolled in primary and secondary schools in Benue State dropped out and only a few numbers of them completed secondary education.

The UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy in one of her addresses emphasized that any delay of providing more educational opportunities for the girl-child will only perpetuate entrenched inequalities and condemn yet another generation of children to a life of poverty, dependence and unfulfilled possibility (UNICEF, 2002). This cannot be achieved without investigating socio-cultural practices and beliefs that may likely impede girls schooling. Therefore, the main problem of this study is how do girls perceive socio-cultural practices and beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling?

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate girls perception of socio-cultural practices and beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. Girls perception of socio-cultural practices as impediments to girls' schooling.
2. Girls perception of socio-cultural beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do girls perceive socio-cultural practices as impediments to girls' schooling?
2. How do girls perceive socio-cultural beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling?

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture as defined by Otite and Ogionevo (2001), is the complex whole of man's beliefs, arts, customs, technology, traditions transmitted from generation to generation. Procter (1995) defined culture as the way of life, especially general customs and beliefs of a particular group of people at a particular time.

Culture here means customs or practice and beliefs that are likely to impede girls' schooling. Cultural practices include: early marriages, use of girls far domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, baby-sitting, hawking, looking after siblings, preference for boy to girl and parental expectation of girls to be good future housewives (Allele – Williams, 1987; Federal Ministry of Education (FME), 1989).

Cultural beliefs according to Ferrante (2001), are conceptions that people accept as true concerning how the world operates and where the individual fits in relation to others. The beliefs include: the belief that girls are not future heads or breadwinners of their families, belief that it is a waste to spend on education of the girl-child, that there is no continuity of family name through girl, the girl will eventually marry outside the family (FME, 1989).

Parents' cultural practices and beliefs are likely to have some effects on girls' schooling. Dubey, Edem and Ihakur (1979) argued that no other agents of socialization is as important to the total make up of the child as parents for the primary socialization begins here that the important identifications with ethnic groups, culture, religion, social class and even how he/she views himself/herself as a male for female have their origin in his/her parents. Musgrave (1979) corroborated that parents have real influence on their children in that their values in relation to education can affect the behaviour of their children. Downey (2004) stressed that measure of parental socialization at home such as talking to children about school related maters, high

educational expectation, warm and consistent discipline, shows consistent associations with children's school success.

Parents' socio-cultural practices and beliefs, according to Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) (2001), lead girls to view marriage as the ultimate purpose in life and if they get a good husband who can take care of them, they feel there is no need getting education to themselves. Sometimes, parents insists on their daughters marrying early while they are still virgins so that they do not become defined (Villareal, 2004).

The situation where many girls are not schooling is very serious, and has attracted the attention of the world organisations, such as; the United Nations International Children Education Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank. For example, the UNICEF Executive Director, Caro Bellamy in one of her addresses declared "it is our commitment that no girl will be left behind as the girl's country attempts to move forward... every girl will be literate to assume her rightful place as an agent in her country's development" (UNICEF, 2002:1).

The UNICEF Director's declaration stems from the numerous advantages obtained from the girl-child education. Girls' education as mothers' of tomorrow, raises a nation's economic productivity, reduces fertility rates, lowers maternal and infant mortality rates; improves the health, nutrition and well-being of families plus ensuring greater prospects of education of children (Bahaia, 1995). Education of the girl-child is viewed as a key to real progress in overcoming poverty (UNICEF, 2002). Girls are women and mothers of tomorrow, hence they are first educators of next generation, diffusers of knowledge throughout society and transmitters of core-cultural and social values (Bahaia, 1995).

It is due to many benefits derived from education of the girl-child that several efforts are being made by governments and non-governmental organizations to ensure that as many girls as boys attend schools. For example, the UN through her agencies like the UNICEF, UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank has been spending huge sums of money in organizing conferences, seminars and workshops in order to increase girls' attendance to school. Nigeria governments have been making similar efforts. In 1955 and 1957, the west and eastern governments respectively introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE) in their regions (Fafunwa, 1974). The Federal Government followed suit and in 1976 introduced UPE nationwide.

Other efforts made by the Federal Government of Nigeria include the publication of the Blueprint on Women Education in Nigeria in 1986, and launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999. The Benue state government has also made several efforts by organizing seminars and workshops to sensitize teachers and parents on the need to send girls to

schools. Though lots of efforts are being made to provide more educational opportunities for girls, the problem still persists. Hence girls' perception of socio-cultural practices and beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling may likely contribute to the current efforts to increase girls' school attendance.

METHODOLOGY

A survey design was adopted for the study. This design, according to Hale (2011), can be employed where participants are allowed to answer questions administgered through interviews or questionnaires. The study was conducted in Kwande and Ushongo Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue state, Nigeria. The population of the study consists of all the 883 senior girl-students in six Government Secondary Schools namely: GSS Anwase (125), GSS Kachi (118), GSS Koti (160), GSS Alu (148), GSS Lessel (175) and GSS Ushongo (157). The data were obtained from the Teaching Service Board (TSB) Makurdi for the enrolment of 2014/15 academic session. Purposeful sampling was adopted for selecting GSS Anwase, GSS Koti, GSS Alu and GSS Ushongo. The total sample of 520 girl-students was randomly selected from the four schools.

Instrument

The instrument titled Girls Perception of Socio-Cultural Practices and Belief as Impediments to Girls' Schooling (GPSPBIGS) was developed by the researcher. It is a structured questionnaire for girls. The questionnaire is divided into two the first part contains the bio-data of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire has a total of 30 items; 17 items are based on socio-cultural practices and 13 items on socio-cultural beliefs. The instrument is based on four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by three experts one each in Sociology of Education, Gender Studies and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was determined by conducting trial-test on 30 girl-studentsoutside the target population. Adopting Cronbach Alpha procedure, the reliability coefficient of 0.91 was obtained.

The researchers employed and trained four research assistants to assist in data collection. They were trained to administer questionnaires to the respondents, wait for the respondents to complete the questionnaires and collect them on the spot. They were also trained to ensure that the respondents do not copy from each other. All the 520 questionnaires administered to the respondents were properly completed and returned, that is 100 percent return rate. In analyzing the data, means and standard deviations were used for answering research questions.

RESULTS

The data collected for the study were statistically analyzed using SPSS IBM – version 20. Data analysis was guided by two research questions and presented in tables as follows:

Research Question One

How do girls perceive socio-cultural practices as impediments to girls' schooling?

Table 1: The mean ratings and standard deviations of girls perception of socio-cultural practices as impediments to girls' schooling.

Items	Socio-Cultural Practices	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1.	Withdrawal of girls from school for early marriage	520	2.76	1.18	Accept
2.	Forced early marriage	520	2.45	1.10	Reject
3.	Girl is married out to pay school fees for her brothers	520	2.35	1.13	Reject
4.	Girls are married young or may be defiled	520	2.54	1.09	Accept
5.	Withdrawal of girl from school to allow her brothers continue with schooling	520	2.70	1.11	Accept
6.	Parents are more interested in girls' marriage than schooling	520	2.52	1.14	Accept
7.	Girls work to increase family budget	520	2.74	1.03	Accept
8.	Girls are used as a source of farm labour	520	2.80	1.04	Accept
9.	Girls are used for baby sitting for relations and others	520	2.68	1.09	Accept
10.	They look after sick members of the extended family	520	2.64	1.12	Accept
11.	Girls are expected to look after their siblings at home	520	2.56	1.07	Accept
12.	Girls are expected to hawk goods to help parents cope with poverty	520	2.71	1.09	Accept
13.	Girls are expected to take care of sick ones in	520	2.72	1.11	Accept

	the family				
14.	Girls are expected to support mother in her trade or farm	520	2.82	1.07	Accept
15.	Girls are expected to do petty trading to support family income	520	2.66	1.09	Accept
16.	Girls work as paid house helps	520	2.58	1.11	Accept
17.	Girls must stay at home to be prepared for good wives.	520	2.57	1.22	Accept

Table one indicates that items 2 and 3 have means 2.45 and 2.35 respectively below 2.50. This means that the respondents did not perceive items 2 and 3 as the socio-cultural practices that impede girls' schooling. However, the respondents perceived other 15 items as eth socio-cultural practiced that impedes girls' schooling.

Research Question Two

How do girls perceive socio-cultural beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling?

Table 2: The mean ratings and standard deviations of girls' perception of socio-cultural beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling.

Items	Socio-Cultural Beliefs	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remarks
18.	Girls are not future breadwinners of their families	520	2.67	1.16	Accept
19.	Girl are not future heads of their families	520	2.76	1.11	Accept
20.	Belief that education of a girl ends in the kitchen	520	2.82	1.15	Accept
21.	The benefit of educating a girl goes to her husband	520	2.96	1.06	Accept
22.	A girl will eventually marry outside her family	520	3.03	1.03	Accept
23.	There is no continuity of family's name through the girl	520	2.84	1.09	Accept
24.	A literate girl will never find a good	520	2.18	1.17	Reject

	husband				
25.	Literate girls are barren	520	2.39	1.18	Reject
26.	Literate girls are uncontrollable	520	2.52	1.11	Accept
27.	Benefits of educating a girl go to her husband's family	520	2.88	1.05	Accept
28.	It is better to spend on education of a boy than a girl	520	2.98	1.11	Accept
29.	Girls do not need formal education	520	2.43	1.14	Reject
30.	Educating a girl is like watering another man's garden	520	2.65	1.19	Accept

Table two indicates that items 24, 25 and 29 each have means below 2.50. This means that the respondents did not perceive items 24, 25 and 29 as socio-cultural beliefs that impede girls schooling. Nonetheless, the respondents perceived the other 10 items as socio-cultural beliefs that impede girls' schooling for the items have means above 2.50.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The main purpose of this study was to investigate girls' perception of socio-cultural practices and beliefs as impediments to girls' schooling. The discussion of the results is as follows:

Girls' Perception of Socio-Cultural Practices as Impediments to Girls' Schooling

The findings of the study in Table 1 indicate that only items 2 and 3 have mean ratings of 2.45 and 2.35 respectively below 2.50. This means that the respondents did not perceive that girls are forced into early marriage, and a girl is married out to pay school fees of her brothers. One possible explanation of these findings is that perhaps there is gradual change in the attitudes of parents towards forcing their daughters into early marriage as well as marrying them out to pay school fees of their brothers. Another possible explanation could be that parents have started realizing the importance of educating the girl-child just as the boy child.

One finding in table 1 indicates that girls are withdrawn from school for early marriage. This finding is consistent with the result of the study by Buvinic, Guzman and Lloyd (2007) who reported that early marriage is still practiced in Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Carribean. Innocenti Digest (2001) also reported similar finding that in Kebbi State, Northern

Nigeria the average age of marriage is just over 11 years as agains the national average of 17. Similar findings is also reported by Villareal (2004), Ashimolowo and Akinbile (2007) and Chinyelu (2010).

Other findings in table one reveals that girls are used for baby-sitting for relations and others, girls are expected to look after the sick members of the extended family, girls are expected to look after their siblings at home and girls are expected to take care of the sick ones in the family. These findings suggest that girls are expected to carry out domestic chores at early age preparatory for marriage. This is consistent with what Fafunwa (1974) reported that prior to the introduction of formal education in Nigeria, girls were trained in child upbringing and domestic chores.

In addition, the findings of the study indicate that girls work to increase family budget, girls do petty trading to support family income, girls do hawking to help parents cope with poverty, they support their mothers in their trade or farm, they also work as paid house helps and are used as a source of farm labour. From these findings it is obvious that girls are engaged in paid and domestic labour. The findings are similar to that of Assaad, Levison and Zibani (2001) who reported in their study that girls interviewed choose errands, household chores, and cooking as the first and second most time consuming domestic chores; that girls enter work primarily for money, 46.3 percent of girls are engaged in market work and 63 percent work in fields; on farms, workshops and factories.

One of the findings of the study indicates that girls are engaged in labour force because of poverty. This particular finding agrees with the study by Dakore (2000) who reported that in Zambia, girls were involved in child labour because of poverty, that 81 percent of girls surveyed, said that they were working because their parents could not provide the basic needs of the families.

Girls' Perception of Socio-Cultural Beliefs as Impediments to Girls' Schooling

The findings of the study in table 2 indicts that: girls are not future breadwinners or heads of their families, education of a girl ends in the kitchen, the benefits of educating a girl go to her husband, a girl will eventually marry outside her family, there is no continuity of family's name through a girl. These findings of the study are consistent with the studies by: Allele – Williams (1987), FME (1989), FAWE (2001) and Karo (2005). However, the same study found that girls did not perceive the beliefs that a literate girl will never find a good husband literate girls are barren and girls doubt need normal education as impediments to girls' schooling.

Implication for Girl-Child Education

This study has some far-reaching implications for girl-child education. The fact that early marriage is still practiced in Kwande and Ushongo LGAs, may likely have some grave negative consequences for girls. Girls who are married young are denied the opportunity to receive even basic education as compared to boys, sicne some men are not enthusiastic about sending their wives to school after marriage.

When girls are married very young, it means only few numbers of girls are likely to be enrolled to school. Where girl-child marriage is practiced, girls may likely be withdrawn from schools as soon as husbands are found. This may likely reduce the number of girls in schools and increase illiteracy rate among girls. This can further aggravate gender inequality in education and slow down development. For according to FAWE (2001) the most developed countries of the world also have the highest number of girls enrolled in schools, and conversely the least developed countries of the world have the lowest enrolment figures for girls.

Another implication of the finding of the study is that since girls are involved in market labour, there is a tendency for them to drop out of school and begin working at an early age. Besides, girls are likely to be used as substitutes for mothers in the households that have no biological or step mothers. The end result is that girls who work would have remained in schools had they not been engaged in paid labour market or domestic chores.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Early marriage should be discouraged. Girls who are victims of early marriage should be socialized by the parents to realize that early marriage is no longer an ultimate purpose in life, that literate girls stand better chance of marrying good husbands than the illiterate girls. Through socialization of the parents, girls should become aware that a literate girl is an asset to her husband and the family while an illiterate girl is a liability. Again through socialization, girls should learn the negative consequences associated with early marriage, such as withdrawal from school, widowhood when husband dies, poverty and vagina fistula.
2. Government should make a law forbidding early marriage. The law should stipulate minimum age for a girl to attain before marriage, probably 18 years. The law should also stipulate a tiff penalty for anybody who may break it. The law should be strictly observed, and be implemented immediately when it is violated.
3. Governments, organizations and wealthy individuals should empower poor parents who cannot provide basic needs of the families. This study found that many girls who suppose to be in schools are working as paid house helps, were engaged in petty-trading or farm

work because their parents were poor and could not provide basic needs of the family. There is need to empower power parents/guardians whose daughters are at home or dropped out of schools. This could be done by providing them with financial aids.

4. Governments, non-government organizations and wealthy individuals should provide scholarship or bursary for girls whose parents/guardians could not afford the cost of their education. Alternatively, free education at all levels should be provided by government for girls whose parents/guardians are poor.
5. Avoid discriminating against girls. Parents should avoid discriminating against girls on the basics of their sex. Girls should be provided equal educational opportunities with boys. Parents should be sensitized that the earlier beliefs that education of a girl ends in the kitchen, there is no continuity of family name through girls, and girls are not future breadwinners or heads of their families, are fast declining. They should be also sensitized that in Nigeria, few women have attained positions which were regarded as exclusive preserve of men. There are credible women in law, education, politics, business and nearly in all human endeavours and they are acquitting themselves creditably in their various fields.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated girls' perception of socio-cultural practices and belies as impediments to girls' schooling. The study found that girls perceived the following socio-cultural practices as impediments to girls' schooling. Withdrawal of girls from school for early marriage, girls are married young or may be defiled, girls are withdrawing from school to allow their brothers to continue with schooling, parents are more interested in girls' marriage from schooling, and also girls work to increase family budget. However, girls did not perceive forcing girls into early marriage and girls are married tout to pay school fees of their brothers as socio-cultural practices that impede girls' schooling.

The study also found that girls perceived the beliefs that girls are not future breadwinners or heads of their families, education of a girl ends in the kitchen, the benefits of educating a girl go to her husband a girl will eventually marry outside her family as socio-cultural beliefs which impede girls' schooling. Based on the findings of early marriage should be discouraged. Governments should make laws prohibiting early marriage and girls should not be discriminated against on the basis of their sex.

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