

Improving Girls' Participation in Basic Education in Kano State, Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Suggestions for Improvement

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Abstract

One of the challenging issues that bedeviled policymaking and implementation of Basic Education in Kano State, Nigeria is getting all school – age girls in schools. No responsible government will afford to ignore active participation of girls in whatever education especially the fact that empowering women with quality education is tantamount to empowering the entire society and basic education forms the basis of whatever education to be provided. This paper analyses the issues and problems that bedevil full and active participation of girls in free and compulsory education in Kano State, Nigeria. It identifies the decline in moral conduct of girls participating in education, misrepresentation, misappropriation of the curriculum implemented in the schools, inadequate provisions of conditions that ensure gender sensitivity, safety and health issues in schools as some of the serious issues and problems to the full and active participation of girls in basic education in Kano state. The paper suggests among others that school administrators have to be more responsive, integrating all teaching and non-teaching staff in repositioning education for good character development so as to ensure standard of education and at the same time maintaining and improving the social, religious and cultural values in educating all learners especially girls. Government and stakeholders on their part must ensure sustainable interventions that welcome gender sensitivity, health and safety issues so that girls and their parents will be attracted to participate fully in free and compulsory education in Kano State, Nigeria. Also, School Based Management Committees (SBMCs) must intensify effective monitoring for proper implementation of curriculum using materials and pedagogies that attract girls' and parents' interest in free and compulsory education in Kano state, Nigeria.

Keywords: Issues, Problems, Girls' Participation, Basic Education

Introduction

The provision of basic education couldn't have happened better than this time when women advances in education are visible all over the spheres of life. In recent years, three key important parastatals in Kano state are held by female; the head of civil service, the state permanent secretary, and Ministry of Women Affairs. In line with goal 4.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015) which states that "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes", Kano state government revised its policy and extends the provision and implementation of basic education to secondary schools. This demonstrates its commitment towards giving the state a hope for a literate society through equitable access to quality education.

The elimination of all fees and charges on education and compelling every parent or guardian to perform the duty of sending their children or wards to school, otherwise be sanctioned upon conviction to a fine, imprisonment or both as contained in the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act

(FRN, 2004) is aimed at reducing the adverse effect of poverty on education and make all children participate in education especially the girls. United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (2008) observes that countries that raised the status of their women educationally, economically, and socially generally enjoys high standard of living than countries that do not. This implies that rapid socio-economic development of a nation could be associated to girls' participation in lifelong acquisition of knowledge, value competence and skills. Consequently, girls' participation in education at all levels is a necessity for the sustainable development of Kano state and this is only possible when girls fully and actively participate in basic education.

Although the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was launched since 1999 and the Bill backing its provision was passed since 2004, a teeming population of girls in Kano state are still on the streets hawking and begging for arms and at various homes of well to do families as house helps. Even in 2018, Premium Times (October 4th, 2018) reported that there were over 13 million out – of – school children in Nigeria (girls inclusive). The National Population Commission & RTI International (2016) reported that 25% of female never attended school. The same source reported a Net Attendance Ratio (NAR) of girls in primary schools in Kano state is 59.8%. The question is “why does this problem continue? Are girls in Kano State not deserving of education? From all indications, what affects their participation is of great value to the society. Given that the people of Kano state were known to be responsive to productive policies that better serve the need of the state. However, character development a value that is of relevance seems to be eroded in the education system now a day. This lack of entrenched values and character orientation within the curriculum and/or the process of its implementation may be partly responsible for girls' low participation in education in general and basic education in particular. Increasing girls' participation in education seems to be hinged on the defining character and conduct of the females participating in education in Kano state, Nigeria.

People assume that the more their girls are educated the more bold and disrespectful they become, claiming self-acclaimed rights, develop unnecessary courage and abuses their cultural ways of life. To this end, bringing home the accepted attitudinal change is necessary to reverse the negative assumptions for the essence and impact of education thereby increasing girls' participation in free and compulsory education in Kano state, Nigeria.

Basic Education in Nigeria: Provision, Concept and Objectives

In order to remove all obstacles hindering access to quality basic education that guarantees future learning and survival, the Federal Government of Nigeria calls for the provision of Compulsory, Free and Universal Basic Education. Chapter II, item 18(1) to (3) of the Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) provides that:

- (1) “Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels;
- (2) Government shall promote science and technology
- (3) Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy; and to this end, government shall as and when practicable provide:
 - a. Free, compulsory and universal primary education;
 - b. Free secondary education;

c. Free university education; and

d. Free adult literacy programme”

Although the above provisions seem to be vague as no act or further provision is made on the right penalty to be executed to a government that fails or refuses to provide the above, Igbuzor (2006) argues that “In any case, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights in article 17 provides that every individual shall have the right to education. The African Charter has been domesticated in Nigeria and therefore has the full force of law”.

To necessitate appropriate governments to provide basic education, the Nigeria’s National Assembly, upon the above constitutional provisions, passed into law the UBE Act in 2004. Part I, item 2(1-2) of the Act provides:

- (1) Every Government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.
- (2) Every parent shall ensure that his child or ward attends and completes his—
 - (a) primary school education; and
 - (b) junior secondary school education,

by endeavoring to send the child to primary and junior secondary schools.

Item 4 of the same part provides that:

- (4) A parent who contravenes section 2 (2) of this Act commits an offence and is liable—
 - (a) on first conviction, to be reprimanded;
 - (b) on second conviction, to a fine of N2,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of one month or to both; and
 - (c) on subsequent conviction, to a fine of N5,000.00 or imprisonment for a term of two months or to both.

The above provisions means that provision of quality basic education is necessary upon the appropriate governments in Nigeria and that parents/guardians are obliged to enroll their children and ensure their attendance and completion failure of which attracts the above punishment. But what is this basic education?

The Universal Basic Education Commission (2012) defined basic education as “the education offered to children aged between 3 and 14. It comprises: 3 years of Early Childhood Care Education, 6 years of Primary Education and 3 years of Junior Secondary while Universal Basic Education entails early Childhood care education and the nine years of formal schooling”. The Universal, Free and Compulsory Education Act (FRN, 2004) maintained that “Universal Basic Education means early childhood care and education, the nine years of formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skills acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl-child and women, almajiri, street children and disabled groups.” The current National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) defined basic education as “the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses the Early Child Care and Development Education (0-4) and 10 years of formal schooling. Early Child Care

Development and Education is however segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or *crèches*, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, whilst ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector.”

This means Universal Basic Education Program is a 10-year educational program incorporating the 1-year of pre-primary education which the appropriate government is obliged to provide. Irrespective of age, race, culture, religion, gender, location etc., every Nigerian child has to, as a right, be provided with an opportunity to attend and receive 1-year of pre-primary education, 6-years of primary education and 3-years of junior secondary education.

Basic Education in Kano State, Nigeria

However, Free and Compulsory Education Policy in Kano State has its own unique features. In addition to the integration of the Almajiri system with western education, elimination of all forms of school fees and levies in public basic education schools while making it compulsory, Kano state government called on the State House of Assembly to make a law for Free and compulsory secondary education i.e. to incorporate secondary education as part of basic education to be provided by the government. This is in line with Goal 4.1 of the SDGs that “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” This goal is the modification of goal 2 of the previous MDGs that was limited to primary education.

To fully achieve this, the government is earmarking 2.4 billion Naira annually for the implementation of the programme. The policy as stressed by the governor will capture 1,180 schools with 834,366 pupils at the cost of 200 million Naira monthly and 2.4 billion yearly. The Kano State government purchases new uniforms for 779,532 enrolments at the cost of 381 million Naira. At the same time the government engaged in recruitment of 3000 voluntary teachers to teach in Tsangaya Schools in the state. To complement the Federal Government Intervention Programme, the state government includes the Primary Four, Five and Six in the feeding programme, earmarking 357 million naira monthly. The policy has necessitated massive rehabilitation and construction of new classrooms, provision of instructional materials, training and retraining of teachers, provision of water, toilets and electricity in schools and strengthening institutional quality assurance. It was also at the epoch making event that the governor presented the following:

- a) Over 110,000 schools across the state designed to enable them build capacity and human resource development;
- b) Distributed 790 digital classrooms all-inclusive empowerment solution and tablets to 728 teachers, 39 master teachers, nine senior secondary school officers and 14 principal officers, with the aim at capacity building towards Free and Compulsory Basic and Secondary Education, for school development plan (SDP) and ICT appreciation for Directors and Zonal Education Directors (Kano State Universal Basic Education Board, 2020).

Therefore, the State governor solicited community and religious leaders to sustain the new education policy for transformation of the education landscape of the state and improve its standard.

Girls’ Participation in Basic Education in Kano State: Issues and Challenges

Despite the continuous efforts of holistic implementation of basic education in Nigeria, gender disparity which showed up at the inception of the program has continued to manifest up to the current period especially in Kano state. As cited in Njoku’s (2006) report that gender is an important factor in the pattern of educational marginalization, expressing concern over the huge number of out of school girls in northern Nigeria of which Kano is one. He also noted “the attendance ratio of female students in the Northwest is 47 percent”, meaning that more than half of the out of school girls in Nigeria are from the

Northern Nigeria with Kano state having 40 percent. Closely related with this is UNESCO's (2014) data that indicated high girls drop out at the lower basic level. Other problems related to girl's education according to the analyses include, poor performance, reluctant to enrol in science-based courses and poor classroom participation (UNICEF, 2018). The aforementioned challenges are clear indications that the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) has not been fully enforced in Nigeria, Kano state inclusive. Siding with this opinion, Njoku (2006) reported that the dimension to this problem is non-implementation of the UBEC Act of 2004. While the national basic education program which is limited to the primary and junior secondary education continues to face the above challenges, incorporating senior secondary schools in the system is more of additional challenge rather than prospect.

Full implementation of the new free and compulsory education policy kicked off on resumption of the new academic calendar 2019 with fears that getting all the school age girls to fully participate in the programme without overcoming those impediments was like myth. However, as vital as the policy is, some of the challenges are fundamental to their ways of life. While all children are equal, male are more privileged to participate in education than female which according to UNICEF (2018) can be attributed to the long held cultural beliefs of Northern Nigeria, Kano state as the largest state in northwest is not an exception. These could simply be put under the following sub headings;

1. **Gender Stereotype:** Gender according to Oakley cited in Zaifada (2005) refers to all characteristics of men and women which a particular society has determined and assigned each sex. Every undertaken in the traditional Kano state has implication on gender, this is why distribution of responsibilities are gender inclined. This belief has come to be institutionalized in their societies as male and females are not seen as same in any ramification. The masculine physique of male are, according to the North-West people, symbol of manliness to face hardships (in fetching for sustenance, protection and maintenance of female and younger ones) and overcome dangerous situations such as in war, drought or famine (Alele in Zaifada, 2005). Identified as sons with their fathers and brothers, they became prepared to take social responsibilities, job, and participate in politics, family and community affairs. The association of education to employment earning and physiological survival makes it more relevant to boys who eventually became breadwinners and those that sustain the family. Muhammad (2013) opined that if going to school is for employment and making a living, the girls have no reason to go to school. Abdou in Nwaubani (1997) argued that "As Boys grew, the training they received were basically to initiate them in to adulthood thereby becoming useful and productive members of their respective societies. Female on the other hands are mentored through the elderly women, as daughters, identified with their mothers and sister to complement male." They are strictly tailored for their ultimate designated social function i.e. wives (take care of the home) and mothers (bearing children). They equally learn relevant skill of their immediate environments such as weaving, knitting, carving etc. with the aim of complementing their spouses in supporting the family and in providing for wares (*Kayan Daki*). These cultural beliefs on the role of male and female are serious hindrance to girls' participation in basic education.
2. **Patriarchal practices:** This according to Denga attaches higher value to male than female (male superiority and female subordination). This is backed with the cultural notion that the male will carry the family name while the female will be married out to another family. For this, she is less likely to be the one to attend school especially when the education needs financial support. Those in rural areas are known to invest in male according to birth order or natural endowments. Therefore, prefers boys for girls.
3. **Neutralization of gender:** The fact that the curriculum and pedagogies employ in transmitting education are extremely neutral, some people in Kano state may misconceive it for instilling sameness in virtually everything including carrier choice. Now a days, some girls have started taking courses assumed to be male inclined like engineering, agriculture, etc. becoming officers in

military, paramilitary, engineering, international relation and in technical/technology carriers. UNESCO (2008) in its report observed that in education gender places role as it affects the curriculum, instructional material choice of carrier and general behaviour of pupils and teachers. This could be seen even in the subjects schools offer. Some are considered masculine while others are considered feminine that many parents for cultural believe discourage and in fact do warn their girls about taking courses contradicting their character. This are evidenced on how influential is cultural believe to the people of Kano State. The question agitating the minds of the education stakeholders include how can our girls cope with the demands of global changed, technology and development that requires higher level of education while still battling with getting them participating at this level? When it is believed that these changes are inevitable and could consume individuals who remain conservative not exploring their potentialities. Hence the need to reconsider the implication of excluding girls from the benefits of education.

4. **Early marriage:** Long before the coming of Islam, early betrothal was a popular practice among the people of Kano state. Girls were engaged at early age. This was to ensure their chastity, security and dignity for their families and community. It assumed that the long years spent in school, interacting with the male could lead to her waywardness thereby embarrassing their parents and the community (Muhammad, 2013). This could be seriously detrimental to girls' prospects as wives and mothers. Marriage before completion of secondary education may be too early for the young bride to understand much about good health, personal safety, nutrition and other important skills for family upkeep. How can the girls deliver what they knew not or do not have? The need to participate in education where Basic science and Biology subjects inculcate and equip the girls with adequate know- how thereby, became better informed to take beneficial decisions and act health wise. This problem persists even today especially in rural areas and it's a serious challenge to girls' participation in any education program.
- a. **Moral Decadence:** The institutions of learning are not helping matters. They pay less attention to checkmate the character and moral development of the students (girls) instead of modifying their character through what is referred to as hidden curriculum embedded in the disciplinary climate of the schools as well the core values of the society. They became an avenue for freedom, cohesion, fun seeking and waywardness. However this menace could not be unconnected with the emphasis on cognitive or intellectual education to the detriment of the affective and psychomotor domains. This made education to become one-sided as viewed by Abdou in Nwaubani (1997) thereby defeating its fundamental aim which according to Fafunwa (1974) "is aimed at developing the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which one lives. Hence, the need to draw attention of the education stake holders on this menace.

The above and many other problems associated with girls' education make many people asking: How relevant is formal western education to the girls? Why must they expose their girls to such dispensations to the detriment of their religious and cultural values they so much believe in? Who keeps the home as everyone (mother, father and children) goes out for work? Until the time when girls participating in education in Kano state reverse these misrepresentations of education, and reflect the religious and cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of the people of northern Nigeria, full participation of girls in free and compulsory education in Kano state will continue to be low.

Conclusion

Based on the relevant literature reviewed, it is not out of place to link the attitudes and behaviors of the girls participating in education to the challenges affecting full participation of girls in formal system of education. More emphasis given to cognitive domain without similar emphasis to the

affective domain has counter-produced and transcended to the inculcation of what the society viewed as undesirable conduct and impede full participation of girls in formal system of education in northern Nigeria. It has therefore, become imperative that adjustment in affective domain of learning is equally vital and need to be attended to suit peculiar circumstances in order to increase girls' participation in education in Kano State.

Suggestions for Improvement

Considering the problem the paper tries to address, suggestions are made to governments at various levels – top, middle, and bottom – that implement the policy at all levels and the people of the Kano state who are the beneficiaries of the policy. Thus,

1. School administrators have to reposition education for character development so as to evolve standard and morally sound educated women in Kano state. This can be done by institutionalizing policies that are in line with the culture of the people at the school level.
2. The policy must be dynamic and constantly open to meet gender sensitivity demands of the people. By so doing girls will be attracted to participate in education in Kano State, Nigeria.
3. There is need for school Based Management Committees (SBMC) to intensify monitoring and ensure social control for curriculum and pedagogies to increase girls' participation in education in Kano State, Nigeria.
4. Incorporation of SBMCs in policy formulation processes to suit peculiar circumstances in Kano State.
5. Governments, Parents – Teachers Associations (PTAs), and other relevant individuals and organizations should ensure that pupils' proximity to the schools is in line with the policy by building more schools where there is none, building more classes where they are in adequate etc.
6. Expanding the dimensions for basic education through distance learning, sandwich programme and part time, making it flexible for the girls to participate in education while attending their responsibility within the household division of labour.
7. Government should have the political will to enforce UBEC (2004) Act that stipulates penalties for parents and guardians who refuse their girls participation in education.

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