

## **Interconnectedness of Girl-Child Education and Poverty Alleviation: Exploring the Dynamics**

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This paper delves into the intricate relationship between girl-child education and poverty alleviation, emphasizing the multifaceted dynamics that underpin this crucial intersection. Empirical evidence from various global contexts reveals that educating girls not only empowers them individually but also generates far-reaching socioeconomic benefits that ripple throughout communities and nations. The study examines the direct impact of girl-child education on poverty reduction. It demonstrates that an educated girl is more likely to secure gainful employment, earn a higher income, and make informed decisions about her reproductive health, leading to smaller, healthier families. These factors collectively contribute to a decrease in the incidence of poverty within households. Furthermore, the study explores the indirect effects of girl-child education on poverty alleviation. It discusses how educated girls are more likely to invest in their children's education and well-being, fostering a cycle of empowerment that spans generations. Additionally, the enhanced economic productivity resulting from a more educated female workforce can stimulate economic growth, further ameliorating poverty on a macroeconomic scale. The paper also scrutinizes the barriers and challenges that hinder girl-child education, including cultural norms, financial constraints, and gender-based discrimination. It underscores the importance of targeted policy interventions to mitigate these obstacles and promote access to quality education for girls.

**Keywords:** Girl-child, Education, Poverty Alleviation, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The empowerment of girl-child education is a transformative endeavor with far-reaching impacts on poverty alleviation and sustainable development. By investing in the education and empowerment of girls, societies can unlock a plethora of benefits that extend beyond individuals lives to shape communities, economies, and the world at large (Grace, 2010).

Moreso, Farell (2005), opine that girl- child education is the process of transforming the female-child with knowledge, skills, attitude, develop the power of self-reliant and improve life chances. Girl-Child education is for making young girls becoming economically independent and self-reliant (Agu, 2007). Therefore, education liberates the mind of the educated from the

shackles of ignorance and that is why any nation that desires sustainable development invests in education, especially, that of girl child, Agbalajobi (2010).

Mamser (1991) cited in Okloho and Ogoh (2012), stated that in a contemporary society, it is believed that if a man is trained, an individual is trained but if a woman is trained, the whole nation is a beneficiary. Mishra (2008), stated that the benefits of educating girls are long established. But there is new understanding as to why educating girls is the most urgent task facing the global development community and how girls' education can drive the international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Girl's education is the most effective means of combating many of the most profound challenges of human development. Adamu (2008) in Obadiah, Modire and Hussaini (2012), stated that the importance of development of girl's education cannot be overstated. To capitalize on the potentials of its people, and ensure healthier, more educated, empowered and productive citizens, Nigeria must invest in educating the mothers of the next generation. Girls who are educated will contribute to future economic growth of their nation. The Federal government promulgated laws and established bodies to promote girl child education, an attempt to critically examine the legal framework for formal education with a view of improving their levels of education in Nigeria. In order to achieve its educational objectives in the country, the Federal government made efforts to promote free compulsory, qualitative education for school children. This is in addition to the efforts by international institutions, nongovernmental organizations and other stakeholders in the educational sector. The Nigeria government has failed and ignored the power of education on country development and providing an excellent human capital for the society.

This paper seeks to unravel the complexities of the interconnectedness between girl-child education and poverty alleviation by examining both the direct and indirect pathways through which education can uplift individuals and societies. It also aims to identify the barriers and constraints that impede progress and discusses policy interventions and strategies that hold the potential to harness the transformative power of education for girls in the fight against poverty.

Ultimately, understanding the dynamics of girl-child education and its role in poverty alleviation is not only an intellectual pursuit but also a call to action. By comprehending the farreaching impacts of educating girls and addressing the challenges they face, we can chart a course towards more equitable and prosperous societies. This exploration serves as a roadmap for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners dedicated to realizing the full potential of the girl-child in the pursuit of poverty eradication and sustainable development.

### **Concept of Girl-Child Education**

The term "girl-child" represents a poignant and multifaceted concept that has garnered significant attention in academic, social, and policy discourses.

The concept of the girl-child has evolved over time, reflecting changing societal norms, roles, and expectations. Historically, girls were often relegated to traditional gender roles, with

limited access to education and opportunities outside the home. The global women's rights movement and international agreements like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Beijing Declaration have played pivotal roles in reshaping the status and rights of the girl-child.

Offorma (2009) defines the girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. She is conditioned to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen.

Poverty have been illustrated using different criteria; such as glaring defects in the economy - evidenced in mass penury, pauperization of the working class, the professional class including artisans, mass unemployment and poor welfare services, absence or lack of basic necessities of life including material wealth, common place regular flow of wages and income and inability to sustain oneself based on existing resources. According to Obayelu and Uffort (2007) poverty has been perceived by many as not just lack of money, food and assets but also as lack of access to education and health care and lack of security, dignity and independence. However, a person's perception of poverty is a function of his present experience, condition of his environment, the aim of such definition, his vocation and his definition of the good life (Fasoranti, 2010)

The concept of poverty alleviation has evolved over time, reflecting changing social, economic, and political contexts. Historically, poverty was often seen as a result of individual shortcomings or moral failings. However, societal advancements, the emergence of social welfare movements, and the recognition of systemic factors have reshaped the discourse on poverty.

### **Girl Child Education and Poverty Eradication in Nigeria**

Education is universally recognized as a potent instrument for social transformation and economic development. When it comes to girl child education, the impact reaches far beyond the individual. In a country like Nigeria, where poverty remains a pressing concern, the empowerment of girls through education emerges as a crucial strategy for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Poverty itself can be a barrier to education. Families struggling to meet basic needs may opt to prioritize boys' education or require girls to contribute to household income through labor, thereby hindering their educational pursuits (Nwadiani & Adigun, 2018). Extensive empirical evidence underscores the economic impact of educating girls. Educated girls are more likely to secure employment, earn higher incomes, and contribute to their families' financial well-being (World Bank, 2020). This not only alleviates poverty within individual households but also bolsters the nation's economy.

The link between girl-child education and poverty alleviation is profound. Educated girls are more likely to delay marriage and childbirth, leading to smaller and healthier families. This shift in family planning reduces the financial burden associated with larger households, enabling families to allocate resources more effectively. Additionally, educated women are better equipped

to secure employment and contribute to their households' incomes, subsequently lifting their families out of poverty and influencing generational change. Educated girls tend to marry later and have smaller families, contributing to population stabilization and enabling better resource allocation within families. This demographic dividend can positively impact poverty rates (Bloom et al., 2015). In embracing the girl child education, all aspects of life be it academic or apprenticeship training, every beneficiary will be able to contribute her quota to the national economic development and stability. It is pertinent to mention here that the higher the level of education, of a girl child, greater the likelihood that she will stay in the labour force. The involvement of females with university degrees is more than double that of female who have only primary or secondary education. This creates an ever-increasing number of experienced and skilled personnel among the female folk. Supervisory and managerial positions can be occupied by them and poverty will be eradicated out of Nigeria.

Numerous studies emphasize the pivotal role of girl-child education in breaking the cycle of poverty. Owing to education's empowerment potential, educated girls are better positioned to secure stable employment, earn higher incomes, and make informed decisions about their health, family planning, and economic participation (World Bank, 2021). The Girl Effect (2011) underscores that educating girls has a multiplier effect, positively influencing families, communities, and societies, ultimately contributing to poverty reduction.

Gender disparities in education persist in Nigeria due to a range of socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors. Adepoju (2020) notes that traditional beliefs, early marriages, and the preference for male education often limit girls' access to education. Geographical disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of gender-sensitive facilities also hinder educational opportunities for girls, particularly in rural areas (Oyekan, 2017).

Education's impact extends beyond income generation. Educated girls are more likely to delay marriages and childbirth, leading to improved maternal and child health outcomes. They possess higher health awareness, making informed decisions that positively affect family well-being (Adebowale et al., 2020). Moreover, education equips girls with critical life skills and confidence, empowering them to challenge gender norms and advocate for their rights (UNESCO, 2021).

The economic empowerment of girls through education is a key driver of sustainable development. Educated women contribute to economic growth by entering the workforce, engaging in entrepreneurship, and participating in various sectors (Okeke et al., 2019). Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reports that women with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in income-generating activities, thereby reducing poverty and enhancing household wellbeing.

## **Education as the Key to Empowerment**

At the heart of the interconnectedness lies the understanding that education is catalyst for empowerment. When girls are educated, they gain not only knowledge but also the tools to make informed decisions about their lives. Education equips them with the skills necessary to navigate challenges, exercise agency, and contribute to their families, communities, and societies. This empowerment extends to financial independence, improved health awareness, and the ability to participate in economic activities- all pivotal elements in the battle against poverty.

Education serves as the gateway to knowledge and skills that empower individuals to navigate the complexities of life. A study by Freire (1970) introduced the concept of critical consciousness, emphasizing that education not only imparts information but also encourages critical thinking and the ability to question the status quo. This critical consciousness empowers individuals to analyze their circumstances, challenges injustice, and work towards positive change.

Numerous studies have highlighted the profound impact of education on gender empowerment. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020) asserts that education is a fundamental right that helps women and girls break free from traditional gender roles, empowering them to participate in decision-making, enter the workforce, and contribute to economic growth. The Girl Effect (2011) demonstrated that educating girls has a transformative effect on families and communities, leading to improved health outcomes, reduced poverty, and enhanced social mobility.

Education serves as a powerful driver of socioeconomic empowerment. Studies by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004) have shown that individuals with higher levels of education tend to earn higher incomes and have better access to employment opportunities. Education equips individuals with skills that are crucial in a rapidly changing job market, empowering them to adapt and thrive in various sectors.

Health empowerment is another facet of education's impact. A review by Ross and Wu (1995) found a strong positive correlation between education and health outcomes. Educated individuals tend to have better health awareness, make informed health-related decisions, and access healthcare burdens on communities.

Education also plays a crucial role in civic empowerment. The UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development framework (2019) emphasize the importance of education in fostering responsible citizenship and active participation in democratic process. Educated individuals are more likely to engage in civic activities, advocate for social and environmental change, and contribute to the development of their societies.

Despite the transformative potential of education, challenges exist in ensuring equitable access to quality education. Studies by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2020) highlight disparities based on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical

location. Overcoming these challenges requires targeted policies, investment in education infrastructure, and addressing barriers that hinder marginalized populations.

### **Constraints to Girl-Child Education**

Many factors are responsible for this general low level of girl-child education in Nigeria. Colonialism is one such factor that has been identified as a major barrier to girls' education. The British colonial policies in Nigeria were dominated by 'Victorian' ideology which presented men as 'breadwinners' and women's role as domestic and procreation (Olaleye, 2008). This explains why emphasis on girls' education during the colonial period was limited to the stereotypical jobs of sewing, house-making and laundry which aimed at making women 'good wives', mothers and good ornaments of the society. Many socio-cultural barriers still hinder the empowerment of women through education. For example, the basic socialization process still presents marriage as an unequal relationship between men and women. In such an unequal gender relationship, a girl's desire to participate in literacy programme or to improve self through higher education is undermined by her husband in order to maintain traditional status quo in the home. Related to the basic socialization process is the gender stereotyping which still occurs among the traditions and cultures of many ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Nigerian female child is born into a culture of male supremacy as exacerbated in the general preference for a male child. The male supremacy traditions have led some parents to either refuse to send their girls to school or to marry them off at a young age. In fact, when families are affected by serious illness or suffer economic adversity, it is the girl's education that is first discontinued in favour of the boys. This attitude of parents investing in the education of boys and in denying girls their education has largely impacted negatively on the educational system of girl-child in Nigeria (Olaleye, 2008).

#### **➤ Societal and Cultural Barriers:**

- **Gender Norms and Stereotypes:** Deep-rooted gender norms often assign traditional roles to women, prioritizing domestic responsibilities over education. Societal stereotypes can discourage families from investing in girls' education, perpetuating a cycle of unequal opportunities.
- **Early Marriages and Parenthood:** In many cultures, early marriages and pregnancies become hurdles for girls' education. Once married or mothers, girls often face increased domestic responsibilities that make continuing their education challenging.

#### **➤ Economic Barriers**

- **Poverty:** Economic constraints are a significant hindrance to women's education. Families in poverty may prioritize investing in the education of male children, while girls are withdrawn from school to contribute to household chores or income-generating activities.

- **Cost of Education:** Even when education is available, the associated costs can be prohibitive. Expenses such as school fees, uniforms, books, and transportation create barriers, especially for families with limited resources.

## **Conclusion**

Poverty affects education seriously. It does that by reducing the access of people to educational opportunities. Girl-child are such victims as they are less educated and under-represented in all spheres of human endeavour due to “Victorian ideology”, socio-cultural factors, religious beliefs, girl-child labour among other demeaning activities that contravene their right to education. Yet, education is not only a fundamental human right but is critical in empowering girl-child who can contribute in many ways to the development of the society.

The empowerment of girl-child education is a cornerstone of poverty alleviation and sustainable development. By investing in the education and empowerment of girls, societies can harness their potential as change agents, economic contributors, and leaders. As we move forward, it is imperative to prioritize policies and initiatives that support and promote girl-child education, recognizing its capacity to shape a brighter and more equitable future for all.

In Nigeria, successive administrators have adopted several strategies over the year to alleviate poverty but to no avail. It becomes obvious that there is still much work to be done to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the girl child education should be totally embraced and the women folk should be empowered and also given the opportunity to develop their inherent human potential and equip them with relevant skills for self-reliance and self-employment.

## **Recommendations**

To further harness the potential of girl-child education for poverty alleviation, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote Access to Quality Education:** Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should work collaboratively to ensure that girls have access to quality education. This includes eliminating barriers such as gender-based violence, early marriage, and lack of infrastructure.
2. **Financial Incentives and Scholarships:** Scholarships and financial incentives should be made available to encourage girls' enrollment and retention in schools. This can help offset the costs associated with education, including books, uniforms, and transportation.
3. **Community Engagement:** Engage with communities, parents, and local leaders to raise awareness about the benefits of girl-child education. Involving these stakeholders in educational decision-making can foster a supportive environment for girls' education.

**4. Teacher Training:** Invest in teacher training programs to ensure that educators are equipped to create inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environments. Well-trained teachers are essential for girls' academic success.

**5. Comprehensive Sexual Education:** Incorporate comprehensive sexual education into the curriculum to address gender-based violence, reproductive health, and family planning. This equips girls with knowledge and agency over their bodies and reproductive choices.

In conclusion, the interconnectedness of girl-child education and poverty alleviation is undeniable. Educating girls not only transforms their lives but also has a ripple effect that uplifts families, communities, and nations. By heeding these recommendations and redoubling efforts to invest in girls' education, societies can move closer to the shared goal of eradicating poverty and fostering a more equitable and prosperous world.

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