

Enhancing Poverty Alleviation Through Inclusive Education of Girl-Child

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Poverty is a significant issue worldwide, affecting millions of people, and the girl-child is among the most vulnerable groups. This paper explores how inclusive education can be used as a tool for poverty alleviation, specifically for the girl-child. Inclusive education refers to an approach that ensures equal access to education for all students, regardless of their social, cultural, and economic background. This study shows that, investment in inclusive education for girl-child is not only a moral imperative but also, a strategic approach towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development. The study identifies various challenges to implementing inclusive education for the girl-child such as, lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient trained personnel. However, the paper recommends that inclusive education can be enhanced through the provision of adequate resources, training of teachers, and sensitization of communities to embrace the concept. Inclusive education is a powerful tool for poverty alleviation, especially for the girl-child. Therefore, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must work together to create an enabling environment for inclusive education to thrive and empower girls to overcome poverty and contribute to national development.

Keywords: Girl-Child Education, Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Inclusive Education.

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Introduction

Poverty remains a pervasive global challenge that obstructs progress, undermines human potential, and perpetuates social inequalities. Poverty alleviation involves addressing multidimensional poverty, which include not only income poverty but also deprivation in various dimensions of human well-being, such as education, health, and living standards (Alkire & Santos, 2014). Limited access to education, gender discrimination, and societal norms marginalize the girl-child, impeding her opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Recognizing the transformative power of inclusive education, this paper aims to explore how it can be harnessed as a vital instrument for poverty alleviation, particularly for the girl-child.

Inclusive education is a process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing

exclusion from education (UNESCO, 2017). By fostering an inclusive education system, societies can unlock the potential of their most marginalized members, empowering them to break free from the shackles of poverty. The findings of this research highlight that inclusive education plays a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty by equipping girl-child with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for socio-economic empowerment. Giving girl-child access to schooling is a central part of eradicating global poverty. According to the World Bank, better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in formal labour markets, have fewer children and marry later. The UN's sustainable development goals call for gender equality and a quality education for all by 2030. This paper discusses enhancement of poverty alleviation through inclusive education of girl-child.

Girl-Child Education

Girl-child education has been identified as the backbone of the advanced societies of the world. It is a serious issue that should not be treated lightly. Its impact in the society is numerous. Girl child education has a proven impact on the goals related to child reproductive health. Education increases the growth of the economy, national productivity and innovations, as well as the values of democracy. Girl-child education refers to the act of providing educational opportunities and support specifically for girls (UNICEF, 2021). Girl-child education benefits the individual, society, and the world as a whole. Education of good quality is one of the most powerful tools to alleviate poverty. In addition to its benefits for personal health, education also strengthens nations' economic health by laying the foundation for sustained economic growth. Education is key to creating, applying, and spreading knowledge, thereby ensuring the development of dynamic and globally competitive economies and contributes to the national development. The role that education plays in the improvement of the quality of people's lives, acceleration of economic growth, harnessing of human intellect and potentials, realization of political stability, appreciation of tolerance and the institution of peace and unity, cannot be quantified (Jasada, 1999).

Therefore, girl-child education is very necessary and it is an issue that cannot be overemphasized. Every girl-child should be given the opportunity to be educated to bring societal growth and contributes to the society. To educate a girl-child means to train her mind, character and abilities. Education is fundamental human right that should be availed to every girl-child irrespective of the age and nationality, education is paramount. It is the light that shows the way by removing the darkness of ignorance. Therefore, educating the girl-child translates to better health for the future generations, reduction in child mobility and mortality, thus, triggering a snowball effect of achieving all other sustainable development goals in a viable manner. The girl-child education also prepares her to face realities in the society and teaches her to be a good wife and mother. When she is educated, she realizes the full potentials endowed in her; she discovers to be whoever and whatever she wants to be. With education, she would break the shell of ignorance and

open that of self-discovery. Girl-child education is the social and educational processes that enable girls to acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for their personal development, empowerment, and active participation in society (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014).

Girl-child education is like sowing the seed which gives rise to a revitalised, cheerful and full grown family plant. Educated girl-child have the capacity to bring socio-economic changes. Lack of education denies the girl-child the knowledge and skills needed to advance her status in the society. Educating the girl-child will enable her to realise her full potential, to think, question and judge independently. It would make her a wise decision-maker, develop civic sense in her and make her learn to respect and love her fellow human beings. Offering basic education to the girl-child is a definite way of giving her much greater power that will enable her to make genuine choices over the kinds of life she wishes to lead. Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for the girl-child as was affirmed by World Bank.

Research has shown that, investing in the girl-child education also helps delay early marriage and parenthood. In fact, if all girls had secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, child marriage would fall by 64%, from almost 2.9 million to just over 1 million. At the wider societal level, more educated girl-child lead to an increase in female leaders, lower levels of population growth and the subsequent reduction of pressures related to climate change. The power of the girl-child education on national economic growth is undeniable.

Poverty

Poverty has been variously defined by scholars based on their understanding of the concept. Poverty according to Ewetan (2005) has been defined as a situation of low income or low consumption. It is said to exist when one or more persons fall short of a level of economic welfare deemed to constitute a reasonable minimum either in some absolute sense or by the standard of a specific society (Lypton&Ravallion, 1995 as cited in Adeyemo &Alayande, 2001). Poverty refers to lack of physical necessities, assets and income.

Poverty is a complex and pervasive social issue that affects individuals, families, and millions of people worldwide. It is a condition characterized by a lack of resources, opportunities, and basic necessities required for a decent standard of living. Poverty encompasses more than just the absence of financial means; it encompasses various deprivations, including limited access to education, healthcare, sanitation, nutritious food, and adequate housing. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that can manifest in different forms and degrees. It exists in both developing and developed countries, although the manifestations and underlying causes may differ. The World Bank Organization describes poverty in this way; Poverty is hunger and lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, it is fear for the future, and living one day at a time. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been

described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. Hence, poverty is a call to action for the poor and the wealthy alike is a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.

While much progress has been made in measuring and analyzing poverty, the World Bank Organization is doing more work to identify indicators for the other dimensions of poverty. This work includes identifying social indicators to track education, health, access to services, vulnerability, and social exclusion. Poverty varies considerably depending on the situation. Despite the many definitions, one thing is certain; poverty is a complex societal issue. No matter how poverty is defined, it can be agreed that, it is an issue that requires everyone's attention. It is important that all members of our society work together to provide the opportunities for all our members to reach their full potential.

Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation refers to efforts and initiatives aimed at reducing or eliminating poverty. It encompasses a wide range of strategies, policies, and programmes that aim to improve the well-being and living conditions of individuals and communities experiencing poverty. Poverty alleviation is the collective term for actions, aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating poverty in societies. It involves addressing the root causes and consequences of poverty, and enabling people to escape the cycle of poverty.

Poverty alleviation requires a holistic approach that combines economic, social, and political interventions. It involves not only providing immediate relief and assistance to those in need but also addressing systemic issues that perpetuate poverty, such as inequality, discrimination, lack of access to education, lack of access to resources, and social exclusion. It emphasizes empowering individuals and communities to actively participate in their own development. Empowering individuals include providing education, skills training, access to resources, and creating opportunities for economic and social mobility. Investing in education and skills development is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty. By improving access to quality education, vocational training, and lifelong learning opportunities, individuals can acquire the necessary skills for better employment prospects and income generation.

Effective poverty alleviation is closely linked to the concept of sustainable development. It recognizes the interconnections between social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development. Sustainable poverty alleviation involves ensuring that interventions are environmentally sustainable, economically viable, and socially equitable, so as not to compromise the needs of future generations.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive Education refers to an educational setup where children with diverse learning needs are accommodated in general classroom and have equitable opportunities of quality education. Hattie (2012), a prominent education researcher, defines inclusive education as an approach to schooling that aims to increase access and engagement in learning for all students by identifying and removing barriers that may prevent some students from participating fully. According to UNESCO (), inclusive education is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education. The goal is that the whole education system will facilitate learning environments where teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenge and benefits of diversity. Within an inclusive education approach, learning environments are fostered where individual needs are met and every student has an opportunity to succeed. The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI, 2016) defines inclusive education as an approach to education that values diversity and the unique contributions each student brings to the classroom, and that seeks to create a learning environment where all students feel valued, supported, and included.

Inclusive Education recognises all student's entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers, anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences. According to the National Centre on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995), inclusive education means; providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society. When the concept of girl-child education comes in contact with inclusive education, inclusive education becomes a crucial factor in ensuring the education and empowerment of the girl-child. Inclusive education emphasizes removing barriers and promoting equal opportunities for all students, including the girl-child. It recognizes and addresses the specific challenges faced by girls in accessing education, such as gender stereotypes, cultural norms, poverty, child marriage, and discrimination. By implementing inclusive education practices, barriers that hinder girl-child education can be minimized or eliminated. Inclusive classrooms create safe and supportive learning environments where the girl-child can thrive academically and socially.

It promotes gender equality, challenges stereotypes, and fosters a culture of respect and acceptance.

In turn, girl-child education contributes to the overall success and effectiveness of inclusive education. Girls who receive education are more likely to become empowered individuals, contribute to their communities, and break the cycle of poverty. They can actively participate in the society, pursue higher education, access better job opportunities, and advocate for the rights of

other marginalized individuals. Inclusive education plays a vital role in ensuring equal access and opportunities for the girl-child education. At the same time, girl-child education enhances the inclusivity and diversity of educational settings, contributing to the overall goal of providing quality education for all. The relationship between inclusive education and girl child education is symbiotic, with each reinforcing and supporting the other in the pursuit of educational equity and empowerment.

Several challenges influence the implementation of inclusive education. These include:

1. **Limited resources:** In many countries, there is a lack of adequate financial resources allocated to education, which affects the implementation of inclusive education. Insufficient funding leads to inadequate infrastructure, lack of learning materials, and a shortage of trained teachers and support staff, making it difficult to provide quality education for all students, including those with special needs.
2. **Discrimination and stigma:** Societal discrimination and stigma towards certain groups, such as children with disabilities, ethnic minorities, or girls in some cultures, can create significant barriers to inclusive education. Prejudice and stereotypes may result in exclusion, limited access to education, and a lack of appropriate support and accommodations for marginalized students.
3. **Inadequate teacher training:** Teachers play a crucial role in implementing inclusive education, but many educators lack proper training and support to effectively teach diverse groups of students. They may have limited knowledge about inclusive teaching strategies, adapting the curriculum, or addressing the individual needs of students with disabilities or different learning styles.
4. **Limited awareness and understanding:** Inclusive education requires a shift in mindset and a deep understanding of the principles of inclusivity. However, there may be a lack of awareness among policymakers, school administrators, and communities about the importance and benefits of inclusive education. This lack of understanding can impede efforts to create inclusive learning environments and policies.
5. **Limited collaboration and coordination:** Successful implementation of inclusive education requires collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, schools, NGOs, and community members. However, the lack of coordination and cooperation between these entities can hinder progress and limit the impact of inclusive education initiatives.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in explaining this paper is Human Capital Theory. Human capital theory, initially formulated by Becker (1962) and Rosen (1976) argues that, individuals have a set

of skills or abilities which they can improve or accumulate through training and education. This theory suggests that, investing in education and skills development enhances an individual's productivity and potential earnings, leading to improved economic outcomes. Human capital theory is about the idea of humans increasing their productivity and efficiency through a greater focus on education and training. Human capital is the study of human resources. It talks about the development of economic value from how we function as a society.

Human capital development through education is a long time investment that enhances the well-being of an individual. By investing in education, well-educated individuals bring to bear their talents, knowledge, skills and experiences as they function in the various sectors of the economy. Human capital development is therefore, a prerequisite for economic growth and development, as well as a necessary and sufficient condition for poverty alleviation. Human capital theory assumes that, investment in education is necessary to acquire skills and training which, in turn, will increase individual capital (Blundell et al., 1999).



Human capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities that individuals acquire through education and training, which can enhance their productivity and contribute to economic growth. In the case of girl-child education, human capital theory suggests that investing in girl-child education can have profound positive effects on poverty alleviation by breaking the cycle of poverty. Education, especially for the girl-child has the potential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. When the girl-child receives quality education, she acquire knowledge and skills that enable her to secure better job opportunities and earn higher incomes in the future. This economic empowerment can help her escape poverty and improve the well-being of her family. Educated girls are more likely to become productive members of society. They can contribute to

the labour force, engage in entrepreneurial activities, and participate in economic development. By investing in girlchild education, countries can tap into a significant portion of their population, leading to increased productivity and economic growth. Education plays a crucial role in promoting health and wellbeing, not only for the girl-child but, also for their families and communities. Educated girls tend to have better knowledge about healthcare practices, reproductive health, and nutrition. They are more likely to make informed decisions about their own health and the wellbeing of their children, leading to reduced mortality rates and improved overall health indicators. Human capital theory highlights the transformative power of education, particularly for the girl-child.

Summary

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the role of inclusive education in enhancing poverty alleviation, with a specific focus on the education of the girl-child. The paper highlights the potential impact of inclusive education on poverty alleviation, such as breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, improving health outcomes, and promoting social empowerment. Recommendations are provided for policymakers and stakeholders, emphasizing the need for a multi-dimensional approach and gender-responsive policies.

Conclusion

Enhancing poverty alleviation through the inclusive education of the girl-child holds immense potential for transforming societies and breaking the cycle of poverty. It is evident that, girl-child education plays a pivotal role in addressing poverty, as it has far-reaching positive impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Inclusive education for the girl-child provides her with the knowledge and skills necessary to escape the clutches of poverty. Education equips the girl -child with literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking abilities, empowering her to make informed decisions and seize opportunities for personal and economic development. As educated girl-child grows into a woman, she is better equipped to secure employment, earn higher incomes, and contribute to economic growth, thus uplifting her family and community out of poverty.

Inclusive education of the girl-child has significant social implications. Education equips the girlchild with essential life skills, including health education, reproductive rights, and gender equality awareness. As a result, educated girl-child tends to marry later, have fewer children, and makes healthier choices for herself and her family. This has a direct impact on poverty alleviation by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, improving health outcomes, and reducing population growth rates. Educating the girl-child contributes to the overall social and economic development of a nation. However, to maximize the potential of inclusive education for poverty alleviation, several challenges must be addressed. Governments, policymakers, and stakeholders

must prioritize and invest in comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality, remove barriers to education, and provide safe learning environments.

Enhancing poverty alleviation through the inclusive education of the girl-child is a powerful tool for fostering social progress, economic growth, and sustainable development. By investing in the girl-child education, societies can break the cycle of poverty, empower individuals and communities, and create a brighter future for all.

Suggestions

Based on the discussion above, poverty could be alleviated through inclusive education of the girlchild. Here are some recommendations to promote inclusive education and support poverty alleviation efforts for sustainable development:

1. **Eliminate barriers to education:** Identify and address the barriers that prevent girl-child from accessing quality education. This includes improving infrastructure, providing transportation facilities, ensuring availability of safe and clean toilets, and addressing cultural and societal norms that hinder girls' education.
2. **Improve school enrollment and retention:** Implement strategies to increase girls' enrollment and retention in schools. This can be achieved through targeted awareness campaigns, scholarships or financial incentives, providing free textbooks and uniforms, and creating a conducive learning environment that supports the girl-child needs and safety.
3. **Enhance teacher training:** Invest in teacher training programmes that focus on genderresponsive teaching methodologies. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment that promotes girls' participation and learning outcomes.
4. **Promote girl-child empowerment:** Incorporate life skills education and empowerment programmes within the school curriculum. These programmes can focus on building selfesteem, leadership skills, critical thinking, and career guidance to prepare the girl-child for a successful future beyond school.
5. **Engage communities and parents:** Encourage active involvement of communities, parents, and local leaders in promoting girl-child education. Raise awareness about the importance of education, challenge traditional gender norms, and establish community-based support systems that foster a positive environment for girl-child education.
6. **Strengthen partnerships:** Foster partnerships between governments, NGOs, civil society organizations, and the private sector to leverage resources and expertise. Collaborative efforts can lead to innovative solutions, increased investment, and sustainable initiatives for inclusive education and poverty alleviation.
7. **Tailor education to local contexts:** Consider the specific needs and challenges faced by girls in different communities. Develop context-specific strategies that consider cultural

sensitivities, local traditions, and unique circumstances to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of educational interventions.

By implementing these recommendations, societies can work towards enhancing poverty alleviation through inclusive education of the girl child, empowering the girl-child to break the cycle of poverty, and contributing to the overall development of communities.

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