

A History of Girl Child Education in Borno State, Nigeria 1935 – 1960

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Abstract

This study examine girl child education in Borno State from 1935 to 1960. The survey research design was adopted for the research work. The girl-child education has faced so many challenges in the path to acquire education, among which are financial constraints, ignorance and non-challant attitude of parents toward knowledge seeking by female gender, hawking and house chores, early marriage, non proximity to schools around residential areas and lack of enough school infrastructure and finally ineffective, government policies and programmes. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for the analysis of this study. Oral interview and questionnaires were used to elicit information as regard to the primary source, while textbooks, Journals, Pamphlets, Magazines and Internet materials served as the secondary source of data. The findings revealed that towards the end of colonial regime, there was a monitoring pressure by the Northern Provinces to catch up with the educationally advanced Southern Nigeria. There was serious negligence of women in particular in enrolment into western education during the colonial period. Enrolment to these girls schools at this early stage was still done forcefully because the parents feared conversion on their children.

Introduction

An adage implies, educate a woman, and you will educate an entire nation. A woman plays the role of a mother, a wife and other functional societal role. At home, she plays an enormous role in shaping the future life pattern of the children. She is responsible for the upbringing, training, and education of the children. Women play great roles in the inculcation and promotion of education in the society since children are the leaders of tomorrow.

The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into woman and marry. She is conditioned to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen. Education is the process of providing information to a person to help him or her develop mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Everyone has the right to education.

Education is a vital tool for empowerment that allows meaningful contributions to society. Girls education does not only bring the immediate benefit of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development. Education helps girls to develop life skills including self confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and other sexual exploitation. Children of educated women are

likely to go to school. One very important aim of every family is to raise healthy and productive individuals who will contribute meaningfully to society. This can be achieved through the education of the girl-child who is the mother of tomorrow.

During the pre-colonial period, girl child education was highly prioritized. This is evident from the emergence of female scholars of high repute, such as Nana Asmau whose influence in further education of the girl-child was paramount. During the colonial period when western education was introduced, from their actions, it became apparent that the colonial government was unwilling to allow women to participate fully in western education as they foresaw no economic benefit to gain from it. In the post-colonial times, however, joint efforts by the successive governments and various individuals and organizations such as Hajiya Gambo Sawaba, Mallam Aminu Kano, Jamiyyar Matan Arewa, Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), the Northernization policy, Universal Primary Education (UPE 1976), Universal Basic Education (UBE 1999) and many nongovernmental organizations led to the expansion of girl child education.

It is thus, against this background that this paper aim to discuss the contemporary relevance of girl-child education in Borno State. To achieve this, the paper is structured into parts. Introduction is followed by introduction of western education in Borno, western education among women, definition of the concept of the girl-child and challenges of the girl-child education.

Introduction of Western Education in Borno

Western education was viewed in the north as an agent of converting the Muslim to the Christian faith. This view was held by the Borno Community and indeed other emirates of Northern Nigeria. The main, if not exclusive, concern of mission school was to produce school masters who were to graduate to catechists, deacons and then priests. While girls schools were established mainly for the wives and fiancées of their male workers. The missionary policy on education however, received a check in the north because of the dominance of the Islamic religion. Lugard signed agreement with the emirs of Northern Nigeria to the effect that the missions would not be allowed to conduct their activities among the Muslims. It was in view of this fact that the first Christian church in Borno was built in 1936. The few Christians in Maiduguri at that time were mainly immigrant traders and artisans from the south. The small community of Christian formed themselves into a sort of union known as “Borno Christian Band”, through which they requested for land for the building of a church from the resident of the Borno province. With the help of the resident they acquired the land outside the town. Alongside their religious activities, the Borno Christian band also made some efforts at providing education for their children. The land changed its name to foreigners welfare union; the union started a primary school for the children of its members. This primary school developed and later became Maiduguri Holy Trinity Primary School.

Prior to 1938 however, Maiduguri witnessed the establishment of the first western type school in 1915. This school was known as Borno provincial school. It was basically a vocational school and mainly an auxiliary to the colonial administrative system in northern Nigeria. The provincial school offered the following subjects, English, Arithmetic, Religion (Arabic and Islamic knowledge), Physical Education, Vernaculars (Hausa and Kanuri), Hygiene and Arts and Crafts. The provincial school was later renamed and became Borno Primary School. New government primary schools were built in and outside Maiduguri in the early 1920s and 1924, for example, new elementary schools were opened in Monguno, Damboa, Biu and Dikwa. Children were recruited compulsorily because the refusal to send ones children to school was considered a disobedience to the authority. There are reports of parents who left Maiduguri as a result of not sending their children to school.

An industrial school was opened in 1916 and offered vocational training in Agriculture, carpentry, masonry, etc. The former Borno primary school then became known as the Yerwa Elementary School. The Elementary school offered four years of junior primary course. The pupils proceeded to the middle school to continue senior primary course. There was one middle school in each province of the northern region. The middle schools provided most of the staff of the Borno Native Administration. The middle school continued upto 1951 when the system was reorganised to bring about a comparable standard in the southern and northern schools. The Maiduguri middle school henceforth became known as Yerwa Senior Primary School. The first post primary school that was opened in Borno was in 1958. The other post primary schools were built after independence in 1960. The government craft school in Maiduguri was opened in 1958.

Towards the end of the colonial regime, there was a mounting pressure by the northern provinces to catch up with the educationally advanced southern Nigeria. Both the regional and provincial governments were seriously committed to these objectives and had invested a lot of financial and human resources for that purpose. By 1960, there were ten (10) primary schools and two (2) post primary schools in Borno. The two (2) post primary schools were the Borno provincial secondary school and the government craft school. The provincial secondary school later became known as the government secondary school when it was taken over by the government of north-eastern state of Nigeria.

Girl-child and Western Education in Borno

There was a serious negligence of women in particular in enrolment into western education during the colonial period. In 1935, the growth of western education in Borno took another leap, in that year, female education commenced in Maiduguri and Dikwa. Girl classes were attached to the elementary schools in Maiduguri and Dikwa. The classes in Maiduguri started with twenty (20) girls. As a result of increasing government commitment, greater awareness has been created nationwide on girl's education. Some local government

areas in the state have already promulgated edicts to support the promotion of girl's education. There was punishment for withdrawal of girls from school, while dropped out as a result of early marriages or teenage pregnancy are encouraged to return to school. The effort of state government and UNICEF in promoting the girl child education initiative which was found by the Norwegian government, recorded remarkable progress in terms of enrolment and retention.

After the commencement of girls education in Maiduguri and Dikwa, greater emphases were given to the teaching of English and Arabic so as to form the bridge between the native culture of the country. The relevance of Arabic to the British administration of Borno was probably central to Lethem's campaign to extend western education to the children of the predominantly speaking populace. Two years after the inception of the girls schools, the advantages and possibilities of western education pointed out to the populace, they parents promised to send more girls to the school.

Enrolment to these girls schools at this early stage was still done forcefully, because the parents feared conversion on their children, since the schools were established by the British. The girls school in Maiduguri was known as the provincial girls school. Later the school became government girls college Maiduguri. Subjects taught in the school included Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Vernacular, Needle work and Crafts. Science subjects were not introduced at all to the students. The implication of this to the spread of girls' education was that right from the inception, the females and by extension the generality of people were made to assume that science and technical subjects were the preserve of the male students. Sadly, in spite of the fact that educational opportunities increase dramatically for all children, girls were still under represented in schools because, their aggregate percentage, when compared to the proportion of the total female population was still grossly smaller to that of boys in the school system. It is pathetic to note that this horrible situation has not change all over the country. In fact, it is worse still in northern Nigeria as the ratio of girls to boys at each level of education, consistently shows fewer girls than boys enrolled in school.

The Girl Child

A girl child is an under-aged not upto 18 years of age. In other words, she is a female human being who has not yet reached adulthood. Whether in natural terms (as related to puberty), or cultural (as regards to acculturation and initiation), or even in legal terms. Within this range of time, the girl child is totally under the care of the adult, who may be her parents, guardians or siblings, etc. It is also within this period that the personality and character of the girl child is built and shaped. This, however, is basically premised on her cultural environment, and the people she stays with, upon whom she models her behaviour, especially through observation and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments starts and progress to get to the peak of the young adult stage. By

girl child education, the paper is referring to the formal teaching of the girl child in western education.

Importance of Girl Child Education

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators but learners may also educate themselves. Education is also the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, spiritually, politically and even economically. No wonder, therefore, in the universal Declaration of human Rights in 1948, it is considered as a fundamental human right. As generally known, it has been a common and long tradition of the societies in northern Nigeria to marry off a girl who is under-age, thereby curtailing her ability in most cases to further her education, especially in the rural areas.

However, educating the girl-child and generally the woman folk in Nigeria and even beyond is equal to educating approximately half of the population. Educating women is therefore very vital to the development of our societies because it is very difficult for a half-literate society to develop. Furthermore, the saying goes “when you educate a man, you educate one but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. Thus, if you educate a girl-child you produced well-educated and highly disciplined mothers who in turn educate their children (because the mother is the first teacher to every child). These educated mothers will not only bring up their children with sound morality and characters, but will also take care of their families and even come out to the public spaces to contribute their quota in the political and economic spaces. Health wise, women are more vulnerable to diseases. They should therefore, be given special priority to study medical related course so as to help their fellows medically and to be hygienic.

Challenges of the Girl Child Education

Even after independence, education (especially girl-child) remained a neglected sector. The leaders who took over the administration of the region from the colonialist most of whom belonged to the conservative Northern People’s Congress (NPC), like their predecessors seemed directly or indirectly to be physically disadvantaged as opposed to men. The problems encountered in the introduction of female education were multi-dimensional. Government, parents, students and even the larger society have all contributed their quarters. One of the problems encountered from the side of the colonial government itself was lost-consciousness and this was as a result of the British gender ideology of the 19th century Victorian era. In England, there are separate spheres for both men and women. Domesticity was women’s sphere. The British did not find it deem to educate women.

The colonial education policies that posed serious challenge to the development of western education in Borno were the introduction of boarding school for students outside Borno and co-education. While the former scared the local populace due to financial burden involved in maintenance of girl-child in school, the two were equally perceived to be responsible for adulteration of local communities religious and cultural values. For instance, when the co-education policy was introduced, it was to be implemented via the existing schools that were mainly at the district headquarters. This again, imposed limitations as distance away from hinter land automatically excluded girls who by their disposition could not trek long distance to and from elementary schools in the urban centres on daily basis.

Another existing challenges facing female education in Borno is the continuing low interest from the sides of parents, students and larger society especially in the rural areas. This of course has to do with lack of proper understanding of the religion of Islam, which is the religion of majority in the area. Islam emphasizes on search for knowledge regardless of differences in gender. The above discussed problems put together, continue to pose serious challenges to the progress and development of western education amongst females in Borno.

Forced/Early marriage is another challenge. The tradition of the early/forced marriage is common in Borno. Girls of tender age are compelled to marry and in some cases, it is even a forced marriage, in which they are assigned husbands by their parents without consent. Medical sources have highlighted the health hazards of early marriage in the form of child pregnancy after associated with severe difficulty in labour and the possibility of vvf. Domestic chores is another challenge faced by the girl-child. The girl-child is also constrained by heavy load of domestic and household work. Like in most patriarchal society, the girl-child is engaged in various aspects of domestic works such as fetching of water and firewood, cooking and taking care of babies. An investigation revealed that the nature and extent of child abuse vary from one community to another. The fifteen states that were recorded below the national average of the percentage of female enrolment are still in the north. They are Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Nasarawa, Niger, Sokoto and Zamfara States.

Conclusion

This paper discussed a history of girl-child education in Borno state, Nigeria. It also discusses the importance of girl-child education as well as challenges facing the girl-child education in Borno. It has been argued in the paper that right from inception, western education faced enormous challenges. The problem of western education among the girl-child was further aggravated by delay in its commencement by the colonial authorities as well as other colonial policies such as introduction of boarding and co-education school systems and poverty. What added to the existing problems was the attitude and attachment of the local populace to tradition, cultural belief and misconception of religion which have always

emphasize on early marriage and then regard the girl-child as second class citizens. Northern Nigeria is a region with long history of Islamic education in which the girl-child and women generally were actively involved. Even after independence, the successive native governments both military and civilian have come up with various policies and programs that were meant to expand girl-child education.

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