IMPACT OF SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM ON IMPROVING GIRL CHILD RECOGNITION AND QUEST FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Social Studies curriculum is very instrumental in empowering the girl child. Discrimination against the girl child most especially in terms of educational opportunities is a national issue particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. Based on research reports, the male gender has continued to be dominant over the female in terms of school enrolment. Being born and growing up as a girl in a developing society like Nigeria is almost like a curse due to the kind of treatment received from the family, school and the society at large. The development of any nation requires the collective efforts of all its citizens. This paper highlights the impact of Social Studies integrated curriculum towards the girl child recognition and quest for educational opportunities in Nigeria. The paper discussed how Social Studies curriculum empowers the girl child towards recognition and educational opportunities and also discussed the major challenges such as low enrolment of girls in school, financial difficulties as well as cultural biases in favour of males. The paper concludes that the content of Social Studies through the integrated curriculum should intensify efforts towards the empowerment of the girl child in the society. The paper recommends that girls should be enrolled in schools as this is vital to their empowerment and they should be trained to acquire skills that will help them to develop themselves and the society in general.

Keywords: Social Studies Education, Curriculum, Girl Child Education, Educational Opportunities, Social Studies Integrated Curriculum

INTRODUCTION
Women are vital instruments in the development of any nation. The education of the girl child is the empowerment of the women of tomorrow. The girl-child problem around the world has many dimensions but the root of all kinds of discriminations and bias against the girl child lies in the custom, tradition and typical mindset of the society which considers the girl-child and women as inferior beings. The disparity in the education of male and female children...
is a national issue particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. The barrier placed on the
girl child’s self-actualization especially in a traditional Nigerian society is without recourse to
the roles women play in the society. But apart from the domestic task which may be seen as
facts of socialization and convention, women are also very productive in the economic sphere
of the Nigerian society.

There is significant evidence of the linkage between discrimination and violence against
women and girl children. Harmful traditional practices such as food taboos (that discourage or
prevent girls from being given nutritious items in their diet or ensure that only boys get good
food), son preference and female infanticide manifest themselves in health indicators which
consistently show that girls in Nigeria and Africa are worse off than boys. Stereotype attitudes
towards women and girls in the family and community, including their non-recognition as heirs
to family titles and lands and as household heads, reinforce the perception of their lower status.
These perceptions often manifest themselves in domestic and intra-family violence, as well as
acts of sexual violence and exploitation in the community. Women and girls constitute a
majority of those exploited in prostitution and trafficking.

Alabi, Bahal and Alabi in Alabi and Alabi (2014) opined that some poor parents,
especially those in single female-headed families induce or force their daughters to engage in
commercial sex under various pretences. In developed countries, adult women and girls may
lack choices in education, especially in the technological and vocational fields, due to gender
biasness. Because of family and community perceptions on women’s responsibility as care
givers for children, siblings or the elderly in developing countries, they bear a disproportionate
burden of unpaid work and constitute the majority of those affected by poverty. Participation
rights of girl children are undermined because they, as well as women, lack decision making
powers as females. The linkages between discrimination and violence against women and
children are particularly evident in situations of internal or cross border conflict and in
trafficking. Families, communities and nations that endorse discrimination and violence against
girls perpetuate discrimination and violence against women. It is a core reality that inequality
and discrimination against women in gender relations in all societies impact on the status and
rights of both women and girls. Neither children’s rights nor the rights of women can be
realized in an environment of structural discrimination. It is possible that realizing an agenda
of women’s rights, in a given context or in a particular country situation may conflict with the
rights of the child.

Social Studies is the process where the individual learns social and reflective thinking
that will enable him or her actively participate for the survival of the society. Bozimo (2002)
believes that the subject is a specialized area of study that deals with man and his environment and how they interact with each other. According to her, the environment in this context connotes social, political, physical, cultural and technological aspect of man. This shows that if the girl child is left without education, her active participation for the survival of her society becomes minimal. Social Studies is also viewed as an educational programme directed towards the inculcation of the right type of values, attitude and knowledge to the young generation (Kazi, 2007). When the girl child is exposed to this type of education through the Social Studies curriculum, she will not only be able to read and write but will be in a better position to seek for further development of her potentials in higher institutions. This will give her a better opportunity to make positive contribution to the development of her society.

The development of any nation requires the collective efforts of all its citizens and all residents. More importantly, to achieve development, both male and female members of the society need to be carried along. The world conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Geneva in 1990 stressed the need for gender equality in education. The Beijing conference of 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of 2005 also emphasized equity in education. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2013) acknowledges the need to equalize educational opportunities between girls and boys. Gender equality is a major issue in the on-going reform programs embarked upon by the federal government of Nigeria and it is designed to address gender imbalance in education. This is because girls’ access to basic education in Nigeria has remained low (United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2007).

The Social Studies curriculum was introduced into Nigeria after independence with objectives such as: inculcating favorable attitude of social, physical, cultural and economic development in students to enable them participate in the development of the community, first as students and later as adult citizens; The inculcation of the spirit of national consciousness and patriotism in the pupils through interest and involvement in local and national heritage; The development in students of a positive attitude to citizenship and the desire to make positive personal contributions towards the creation of a united Nigeria. The National Policy on Education sees education as the “instrument per excellence” for effecting national growth (FRN, 2013). To this end, the philosophy of the nation’s education is structured and developed around the national policy on education which is in line with the philosophical basis for the introduction of Social Studies education within the educational system. It is hoped that through a better understanding of the culture and values inherent in Social Studies, all citizens will be given equal educational opportunities.
CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION
Social Studies Education

Social Studies is compulsory for all students in Nigerian primary and junior secondary schools (girl child inclusive). The fact that social studies enjoys the recognition of being a core subject at the categories of schools mentioned above means that the subject is perceived as very important and worthy of being studied by all categories of students in Nigerian schools. However, Social Studies as a school subject is comparatively new in the Nigerian academic scene. The institutionalization of Social Studies as a curriculum subject rose out of the realization that the subject study of man and his society was not adequately covered by one discipline in either the social sciences or humanities. Social Studies emerged as a subject of prime importance for study in schools. It studies the basic characteristics of man and detailed investigation into the varied expression of the adaptation of man to the area in which he lives.

According to Adaralegbe (2010), Social Studies is the totality of experiences a student goes through having been exposed to a course explaining the problems men and women encounter in their chosen environments. Additionally, Oloolou, (2010) described the nature of Social Studies in terms of characteristics or essential features of the discipline. Some of these characteristics include: It is a study of man as he interacts with the environment; Man is the central or core concern as he relates with various aspects of the environment; It is integrated knowledge and information drawn from a wide variety of sources used to study man comprehensively. Social Studies therefore portrays the oneness and indivisibility of knowledge and the reality of man’s interaction with the environment. Social Studies is citizenship education, it is a study that exposes learners to the basic tenets of citizenship which emphasizes rights and obligations, human dignity and worth, dignity in labour, moral and spiritual principles in interpersonal relations to make them socially responsible citizenS. Again, Meziobi, Fabura and Meziobi (2012) see Social Studies as the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote effective citizenry. It provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as Economics, History, Geography, Anthropology, Law, Philosophy, Political Science, Religion and Sociology. It draws its contents from the humanities. Social Studies therefore centers on man as he interacts with other members of his society. This shows that the subject promotes human dignity and preserves the rights of every member of the society.

Meaning of the concept Curriculum

Curriculum to Michaelis in Fwamwang (2003), is all the learning experiences of the child under the auspices of the school. The learning experiences include both planned and unplanned experiences. Curriculum, according to Wojtczak in Umeh (2017), is an education
plan that spells out which goals and objectives should be achieved, topics to be covered and which methods are to be used for learning, teaching and evaluation. Curriculum is the sum total of guided learning experiences designed to facilitate learners’ learning for establishing quality relationship between what is learnt and what operates outside the school. In education, a curriculum is broadly defined as the totality of students’ experiences that occur in the educational process. The term often refers specifically to a planned sequence of instruction, or to a view of the students’ experiences in terms of educator’s or schools instructional goals.

**Meaning of Girl Child**

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0-5 years), primary (6-12 years) and secondary school (12-18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be parents or guardians or older siblings. The period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on significant others, those on whom she models her behaviour through observation, repetition and imitation. The physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional development of the girl-child starts and progresses to the peak at the young adult stage (Offorma, 2009).

**GIRL CHILD EDUCATION**

To educate means to train the mind, character and abilities of individuals. Education is a fundamental human right that should be available to all citizens irrespective of age, sex, creed or tribe. There are a lot of human right instruments that provide for education as a fundamental right, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The importance of education in the life of an individual, especially the girl child, can never be overemphasised. In both spiritual and temporal or mundane aspects of human existence, education is paramount. It is the light that shows the way by removing the darkness of ignorance; the salt that gives the taste of life; the medicine that cures; and the key which open doors. The greatest favour one can do to a girl child therefore is “to get her educated”.

According to a Chinese proverb, education is the best legacy to give to a child because “giving your child a skill is better than giving him one thousand pieces of gold.” Many girls today do not have adequate education. When a girl is 12-14 years old, the elders in the community feel she is “ripe for marriage” and their words are LAW. So what are her words worth when the elders in the community have spoken? A girl who is given out in marriage at a very tender age is placed at a very high risk. She is not matured enough to be a mother and is
without any skill, information and confidence that might lead to her being a better mother and wife if she were educated. The native traditional philosophy is that a woman’s place is in her husband’s kitchen and her primary role centres on her home. This belief has kept many girls away from education or pursuing their goals in life.

The issue of discrimination has also remained an unresolved issue in the society and a major concern in many academic discourses. Girl children have not been lucky due to certain stereotyping, cultural and religious beliefs which put them at risk of abuse and neglect. With the contribution of women to the development of a country, there is need to give girl-children all the needed and necessary attention for their empowerment so that they will further make positive contributions to national development. This can be achieved through education which is regarded as the major instrument in the development of human resources of any nation of which the girl-child is a part. Azikiwe in Christoper (2009) attested to the fact that the rate of illiteracy as regards the girl-child in the country is alarming. In most Nigerian homes, females are relegated to the background and their male counterparts are given preferential treatment as some people do not believe in the education of female children (Abdulazeez, 2004).

Ogundipe (2007) and Offorma (2009) asserted that with adequate education, a girl child is enlightened on health and national issues. This will be a better way of helping her bring up her children, make informed decisions about her future and protect herself from trafficking. It will also deter her from engaging in sexual exploitation and acquiring sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDS and other health and social problems. The Child’s Rights Act of 2003 prohibits child marriages and betrothals. In section 21 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, any marriage contracted by anyone less than 18 years old is invalid. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis, particularly in recent times, for all citizens to have access to basic education. When a girl is given out in marriage at a very tender age to a man who is old enough to be her grandfather, her right as a human being has been abused. She has also been deprived of her right to education and will be doomed to be an illiterate forever if her husband does not give her opportunity to school after marriage.

Aderinto (2000) and Fisho (2001) opined that a girl child, before twelve years or at her early teen years, is given out in early marriage to friends and benefactors, visitors, strangers or betrothed to a local hero or cleric. In some cases she is forced to marry an older man in his 50s or 60s while she is only 13 or 15. At the beginning of colonialism, rigid ideas on gender were imposed on the African mind, thereafter, the woman’s role has come to be merely for sexual and commercial labours and satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields, carrying loads, tending to babies and preparing food. How can a girl who is not up to 18 years old be
able to execute all these duties and look after her so called “family”? She is not matured enough to give birth and in the process of giving birth could become exposed to certain viral infections and even lose her life.

It has been established by researchers that enabling female education is crucial for national development, and the role of women cannot be underestimated. The general belief is that “when you educate a man, you educate an individual but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. This is so because the education of every child starts from the family and the mother is the first teacher. Example is late Professor Dorah Akunyili who came up with a programme for rebranding Nigeria with the aim of giving Nigeria a good image before the international community. Educating the girl child produces mothers who are educated and who will in turn educate their children, and care for their families. Kwesiga (2002) explains that educated women contribute to the well-being of themselves, their families, communities and countries. Therefore, educating the girl child translates to better health for the future generation, reduction in child morbidity and mortality thus triggering a snowball effect of achieving all other sustainable development goals in a viable manner.

The girl child needs to be educated to acquire knowledge and skills needed to advance her status for social interactions and self-improvement. Girl child education also prepares her to face the reality in society and teaches her to be a good wife and mother. When she is educated, she realises the full potentials endowed in her; she discovers how to be whoever and whatever she wants to be. With education, she would break the shell of ignorance and open that of self-discovery.

THE INTEGRATED SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM

Today, there is a focus on an integrated curriculum which is described as one that connects different areas of study by cutting across subject-matter lines and emphasizing unifying concepts. Integration focuses on making connections for students, allowing them to engage in relevant, meaningful activities that can be connected to real life. Understanding the benefits and how to effectively integrate the curriculum can help teachers and girl children become more successful in the classroom.

Gender sensitivity about school curriculum offering is gaining global attention and concern because of the growing interest in equalizing access to education for the child irrespective of differences in sex structure. This is more apt when modern states with the accompanying drive for installation of credible democracies clamour for integration of human rights practices, values, skills and knowledge. This will transform social justice principles into functional school curricula for the balanced development of human persons. This will also lead to effective
appreciation of the need for gender equality in the pursuit of life-time opportunities and challenges. Gender-balanced social studies curriculum ensures that content of instruction is unbiased and non-discriminatory to both sexes. The essence is to create a fair school curriculum which offers commensurate situations and learning experiences for the realization of the needs, aspirations, and human rights of both sexes.

A gender-balanced Social Studies curriculum in Nigerian universities is paramount for the achievement of international education standards and quality, which opens conducive learning opportunities for learners to sharpen and develop their intellectual and creative potentials on meaningful national and global issues. Nworgu (2005) observed that the prevalent gender imbalance imperative in social relations in society has drifted into the school system, resulting in gender gap in science, technology, and mathematics. Social Studies education is focused on social issues for qualitative social living and transformation of the society. Social Studies education given its dynamic curriculum is apt for promoting millennium development goals (Mezieobi & Eze, 2009). This implies that Social Studies curriculum at the tertiary levels should address the issue of imbalance in educational opportunities.

One of the cardinal aims of the millennium development goals is to ensure high attainment of gender equity in education pursuit and limit drastically barriers to girl child education. The girl child needs to be given endless possibilities to explore her potentials, needs, interests, and aspirations in relative measures to the male counter parts in the university. Nwaubani and Ezegbe in Meziobi and Meziobi (2012) are of the opinion that effective implementation of the Social Studies curriculum of the universal basic educational level helps in achieving the objectives of Social Studies curriculum as well as respecting the rights of the learner in actualizing access to education. It is in line with this that the federal government in 1999 emphasized free compulsory education for primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Meaningful Social Studies instruction is geared towards promoting gender equality which enhances full participation of women and men in resolving societal problems and proferring of sustainable solutions. A gender-balanced Social Studies curriculum is a situation where both sexes have equity and access in the classroom teaching process. Put simply, there is gender equity consideration in the formulation of Social Studies curriculum in terms of contents, learning experiences, and evaluation of learning outcomes. Gender-balanced social studies curriculum is functional in a technological-driven society and in the current global concern to narrow gender gap and discrepancies in school curricula and human interactions involving males and females.
A gender biased Social Studies curriculum is one in which learning situation, experiences, or content of instruction is organized in preference or in favour of one sex over the other in the learning of tasks, comprehension, and involvement of the learner in the classroom teaching-learning interactive process. In order to ensure that female students are given their rightful place in Social Studies programme and activities, the entire field of education should be gender sensitive. Both sexes should be given equal opportunities and consideration for participation in classroom instruction. Offorma in Alabi and Alabi (2014) posited that personal interest and commitment are driving forces towards career pursuit. Nworgu in Alabi and Alabi (2014) found that females constitute a smaller proportion of students who offer science, technology, and mathematics. The situation is such that science, mathematics, and technology are perceived as masculine disciplines while the Arts and the Social Sciences belongs to women.

EMPOWERING THE GIRL CHILD TOWARDS RECOGNITION AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Achieving change requires policy and programme actions that will improve girl child’s access to secure livelihoods and economic resources, alleviate their extreme responsibilities with regard to housework, remove legal impediments to their participation in public life, and raise social awareness through effective programmes of education and mass communication. In addition, improving the status of the girl child also enhances her decision-making capacity at all levels in all spheres of life. Education is one of the most important means of empowering the girl child with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. More than 40 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that “everyone has the right to education”.

In 1990, governments meeting at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, committed themselves to the goal of universal access to basic education. But despite notable efforts by countries around the globe that have appreciably expanded access to basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults in the world, of whom two thirds are girls and women. There are 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and 70 per cent of them are girls. Therefore effort should be made to eliminate all practices that discriminate against girls, rather, girls should be assisted to establish and realize their rights, including those that relate to reproductive and sexual health and violence against girl child should be eliminated.

Government and civil societies should take actions to eliminate attitudes and practices that discriminate against and subordinate girls and women and that reinforce gender inequality. Government should also take measures to promote the fulfilment of girls’ and women’s
potentials through education, skills development and the eradication of illiteracy for all girls and women without discrimination of any kind, giving paramount importance to the elimination of poverty and ill health. Government, in collaboration with civil societies, should take the necessary measures to ensure universal access, on the basis of equality between women and men, to appropriate affordable and quality health care for women throughout their life cycle.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible.

To this end, at the national level, there is need to promote full and equal access of women to literacy, education and training, and remove all obstacles to their access to credit and other productive resources and to their ability to buy, hold and sell property and land equally with men. There is also need to promote international cooperation to assist developing countries, at their request, in their efforts to achieve equality and equity and the empowerment of girls. Government should also strengthen national efforts, with assistance from the international community, to promote the empowerment of women, inter alia, by closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education and ensuring free, compulsory and universal primary education for both girls and boys. Also, ensuring the reduction of maternal morbidity and mortality should be made a health sector priority. Finally, all forms of violence against the girl child, in the domestic as well as in the public sphere should be eliminated.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION TOWARDS GIRL CHILD RECOGNITION AND EDUCATION

Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually and economically. It is a way in which an individual acquires adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviours to be able to function well as a citizen. The importance of Social Studies as a subject area has the potentials for
inculcating the right attitudes to study man and deals with all aspects of the life of man in the totality of his environment. In view of this, if the right attitude is inculcated, the girl child will be given recognition in the society.

Adaralegbe (2010) explained that Social Studies is the totality of experiences a student goes through having been exposed to a course explaining the problems men and women encounter in their chosen environment. The global goals of social studies education in Kazi (2007) include: Inculcation of values and attitudes in the learners, acquisition of skills, and understanding of knowledge. The objectives of Social Studies education to Kazi include the development of self-confidence and initiative in the students based on the understanding of their own potentials and accomplishments; the development of favorable attitude of social, physical, cultural and economic development in the students to enable them participate in the development of the community as students and later as adult citizens; The development in students of a positive attitude to citizenship and the desire to make positive personal contributions towards the creation of a united Nigeria; The creation of awareness and appreciation of the principles which are fundamental to good and enduring government and society; The development of an understanding in the students of how the lives of people who lived in the past affect our present day living and how improvement can be made for future development.

Nnamani and Oyibe (2016) attest that Social Studies is perceived as very important and worthy of being studied by all categories of students in Nigerian schools. This recognition accorded to Social Studies is derived from the potential of the subject for achieving certain desirable goals for general education in Nigeria. This shows that through Social Studies education, the girl child can be given the recognition she deserves as knowledge of Social Studies gives equal opportunity to all citizens in their environment. The essential attribute of educational objective serves as a guide post in shaping the educational policies and programmes of any given society and must be derived from the needs and values of the society.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

1. There is underrepresentation of girls in schools leading to low education attainment for girls which makes the realization of Social Studies goals and objectives towards girl child empowerment unattainable.

2. Due to financial constraints as a result of poverty, many girls face significant challenges in attending school regularly which results to drop out hence the girl child is not empowered through the Social Studies curriculum for effective citizenship in the society.
3. Violence in schools is also a barrier to girls’ education as this interrupts school programmes leading to poor achievement of Social Studies goals and objectives towards girl child empowerment.

4. The universal cultural biasness in favour of males is a major challenge to girl child education. The wide spread operation of early marriage and heavier domestic and subsistent duties of females especially in rural areas pose difficulties in the empowerment of the girl child. A generally lower regard for value of female life, all combine though differently in each case, to adversely affect the participation of girls and women in education.

RECOMMENDATION

1. Girls should be encouraged to enrol in schools as education is the key to their empowerment. This will give them the opportunity to contribute to the development of their country.

2. Girls should be trained to acquire practical skills that will help them to overcome financial difficulties and poverty which will reduce school drop out. These skills will empower them for better economic growth. Every girl should be taught to be determined to break the powerful cycle of poverty through education in line with one of the core principles of social work which is client’s self-determination.

3. Policy makers must also create an enabling environment for peaceful implementation of Social Studies curriculum to promote the empowerment of the girl child.

4. There should be creation of awareness on value of the girl child with more emphasis on the role of women in developing their economy. Cultural practices that discriminate against women should be discouraged.

CONCLUSION

This paper has identified several issues that have continued to place discriminatory tendencies against the girl child. The basic concepts in the topic were clarified. The effectiveness and efficiency of education as regards the girl child can only be achieved if the girl child is empowered towards recognition in the society. Viewing the content of Social Studies education, the teachers through integrated curriculum should intensify efforts towards the empowerment of the girl child in the society. Challenges towards girl child empowerment have been tied down to a number of factors such as socio-cultural beliefs, poverty, illiteracy and so on. These factors are responsible for gender inequality in the education sector. The largest hurdle that needs to be overcome before all African girls can get the education they deserve is the social thought that minimizes the importance of education for girls. In the light
of this, recommendations have been made to minimize the impact of discrimination against the
girl child, most especially in Nigeria.

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