
UTILIZING ISLAMIC VALUES IN PROMOTING GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Education is believed, according to Ijaduola (2010), to be the most effective way of bringing about transformation and modernization into the society. The concern for individual access to education makes the government and stakeholders to be spending and investing heavily on it and it has been improving with the exclusion of the girl-child education which is drastically low according to UNICEF (2007) especially in the Northern part of Nigeria. This study therefore examines the concept and status of girl-child education as well as its impediments. It also delves into the position of Islam on girl-child education. It identifies socio, economic and religious factors as the impediment. The paper discusses and advocates the utilization of Islamic moral values to check the factors militating against girl-child education. The paper then concludes by suggesting the setting up of a committee to look into the way forward on girl-child education in Nigeria's contemporary educational scheme with a view to incorporating Islamic values into the system.

Keywords: Islamic Values, Girl-Child, Education, Nigeria

Knowledge is an indispensable tool for the progress and development of both the society and individual. It is through it that man is regarded and revered while its absence strips him of his true being (Yakubu, 2010). Knowledge is obtained through education which can be formal, non-formal or informal. Thus, education is regarded as the best legacy that can ever be given to the citizens of a country as their right (Igbuzor, 2006), this is because, it plays a pivotal role in the development of both the individual and the nation (Suraju, 2013:1). It is the greatest gift of life and the cornerstone of economic growth and social development as well as a principal means of improving the welfare of the individual (Olasunkanmi, 2005) including the female gender.

However, priority is given to the boy-child education over the girl-child especially in the Northern part of the country. This, generally, is as a result of the belief that women or girls are second class citizens (Enejere, 1991) that are meant for nothing other than production of children, enjoyment and inheritance (Goodluck, 2011). This is why many parents in the rural area would prefer to invest on the boy-child than on the girl-child (Ada, 1992). They are being marginalized and relegated to the lowest level in most of the societies as well as civilizations (Juwayriya, 2012). Their education is neglected just because it is believed that girl-child education has no future benefit as it ends in the kitchen.

According to UNICEF (2010) in Jubril (2011), the rate of girls that are out of school are higher than that of boys in Nigeria while Okiki (2010) reported that presently, 2-3 students out of 150 students in the Northern part of Nigeria are girls. It should also be noted here that the few girls that are being enrolled in schools are not also pursuing their education to a meaningful level where it can be useful for them, their family, women-folk and the country. Various researches have shown that many factors serve as impediment to the progress of the girl-child education in Nigeria and both government and the stakeholders have been trying to solve these problems and improve the enrolment of girls in school so as to promote girl-child education through the initiation of various programmes and committees. However, this has not yielded up to the level of the boy-child education in the country because of some other unconsidered impediments such as immoral dressing, religious discrimination and civilization and so on.

It is against this backdrop that this paper presents the position of Islam on girl-child education as many people have attributed this ludicrous attitude of not allowing the girl-child to go to school in many parts of Northern Nigeria and some areas in the South-Western region of the country, in most cases to the religion and especially Islamic religion.

To accomplish the set objectives, this paper is divided into sections: the abstract, introduction, conceptual definitions, status of Girl-child Education, Factors militating against Girl-Child Education in Nigeria, Utilizing Islamic Values in promoting Girl-Child Education and the conclusion as well as recommendations.

Conceptual Definitions

It is pertinent at this juncture to briefly explain some concepts that are essential to this discussion so as to properly understand them in the way they will be used in the context. These concepts are: values, Islamic values, Girl-Child, Education and Girl-Child Education.

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Values: These are principles which are used to define what is right, wrong, good, bad and just (Frank, 2010). Values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong. They tend to influence attitudes and behaviours. Values also refer to core beliefs that guide and motivate attitudes and actions (Ethics Resource Centre, 2009). However, these values vary across individuals, cultures, religions and civilizations as they have to do with belief and belief system (Wikipedia, n.d). Thus, different cultures exhibit different values depending on the welfare and well-being of the people. Values are capable of molding, changing and affecting the beliefs, attitudes, actions and behaviours of people especially the students even if they do not agree with them. The case of Western value through western education is a good example to buttress this assertion.

Islamic values are principles that are divinely set out or judged in the Qur'an and the practice of the noble prophet Muhammad to be right, wrong, good and bad. These are principles that are meant to protect and guarantee easy life and social well-being in the society.

Girl-Child: This is a combination of two words "Girl" and "Child" which come together to mean a young female person that is still under the guardianship of the parent or guardian (Juwayriyyah, 2012:3). Initially, the age of a girl child was put below fourteen (14) years according to National Child Welfare policy (1989) as cited by Ada (2007:314). However, UNICEF in line with the Child's Rights Act of 2003, defines a girl-child to be a girl below the age of 18 years which according to Goodluck (2011) is a period that is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. In his own submission, Offorma (2009) defines girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age.

Education: This word is from the latin word "*Educare*" which means "to rear or bring up". It is also believed that it is from the latin root "*Educo*" which means "to educe or draw out". With regards to "*educare*", it means education has to do with child rearing or upbringing. It has however been defined in various ways by different scholars based on their own perspectives. According to the World Bank Encyclopedia (1992), Education is the ways in which people learn skill and gain knowledge and understanding about the world and about themselves. It covers the intellectual, social and moral aspects. It can also be defined as the imparting and acquiring of knowledge through teaching and learning especially at a school or similar institution (Microsoft Encarta, 2008). In the opinion of Ocho (2005:24), it is a process of making an individual a functional member of the society. It can be informal, formal and non-formal.

Girl-Child education is the process of imparting knowledge into the young female child so as to develop their cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains which in turn will make them functional members in a given society.

Status of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Despite the declaration of the Nigerian Government in her National Policy on Education (1977, last amended in 2006) that the basic education is free for every Nigerian Child, there is still low enrolment of girl-children in both the primary and secondary levels of education in some states of the country and especially in the Northern States. On this, President Olusegun Obasanjo was reported to have said according to This Day Newspaper (2005) that:

... It is unacceptable that these two zones (North-Western and North Eastern) have the highest under-five mortality, the lowest immunization and the poorest women literacy levels in the country.

The illiteracy of the women being referred to in the above quotation does not start at the adult age but from childhood. Research has shown that the South West, Eastern and Southern Zones are at a higher level than the Northern Zones as affirmed by the former president of Nigeria. In the year 2003, the following statistics were given with regards to girl-child education in Nigeria:

Zone	Percentage (%)
South-South	75
South-East	85
South-West	89
North-East	20
North-West	25

Source: This Day Newspaper (2005)

Position of Islam on Girl-Child Education

Girl-child has been maltreated, dishonored and discriminated against since time immemorial even before the advent of Islam. The women including the female children were nothing other than goods and chattels (Nazhat and Ahmed, 1969:10). They were not only denied politico-educational activities but also socio-economic activities. They were considered as the lowest creature of the low as well as the “waters of woe” that wash away all good fortune (Nazhat and Ahmed, 1969:15). The ancient countries that were deeply rooted in this ludicrous attitude towards the girl-child include India, Rome and Greek among others (Suraju, 2013).

It was in the darkness of the above situation that Islam came as a universal religion to liberate the women from the shackles and bondages by making them as mates to their male counterpart as contained in Q. 4:1 which says:

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O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created from her, his mate, and from them twin scattered (like seeds) countless men and women ...

By the above, it means Islam takes the life of girl-child as sacred as that of a man by giving them freedom of choice of action and equality with men in treatment and rights as well as reward and punishment. This means that there is no difference between man and woman in socio-religious and intellectual responsibilities as they are liable for their actions and utterances through reward and punishment. It is quite amazing today, that some people and societies are still maltreating the female gender despite the divine liberation given to them. One of the contemporary unfair and unjust treatment is the denial of the girl-child their right to gainful and useful education. This has been attributed to Islam, as a religion, and *purdah* i.e. veil as a mode of dressing in Islam by forcing the women to sit at home. This belief is not only a fallacy but heresy in the pristine Islam brought by Prophet Muhammad through the revelation of the Qur'an and his Sunnah.

Education in Islam is more than mere literacy which is the ability to read and write. It is the process through which the child is assisted to discover the human elements in him, his talents, his potentials, recognize his duties and rights as well as identifying the purpose of his creation and how to conduct his affairs in this life in accordance with the divine purpose (Karwai, 2010). Thus, Islam makes the seeking of knowledge an equal and a compulsory right for every Muslim either male or female as the glorious Qur'an ascertains that learning or education is priceless and that only the learned can understand the signs of Allah. The Qur'an says: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (Q. 39:9). The Muslim either male or female has been commanded also to read and seek for knowledge according to Q. 96:1-5 which says:

*Read in the name of your Lord Who created He created man from a clot.
Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught by the pen Has taught man that which he knew not*

In Islam, education is so vital and essential in the life of every gender that the noble prophet (S.A.W) said: "It is incumbent on every Muslim (male and female) to seek knowledge" (Ibn Majah, 1/81). In another narration, he said: "whoever treads a path with the intent of seeking knowledge, Allah renders the path of paradise for him" (Muslim, Hadeeth No. 2699). In fact the noble prophet has taken his time and pain to educate the female. That is to say, he had keen interest in the education of girl-child. One of his students was his own wife, ^cAishah, who was highly learned and later became a teacher of Qur'an to other Muslims as well as a strong authority in the field of Hadith (Sidiqat, 2006:182). The prophet (S.A.W.) was even reported to have said to his companion to take half of their knowledge from ^cAishah (R.A). By this, she was

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frequently being asked various questions after the demise of the prophet. Hence it was said about her that:

She became so knowledgeable that she was able to teach men and was a source of authorization and documentation in hadith transmission and sacred law (Abdel-Hamid, 2001:50)

More so, the early Muslim women during the life of the prophet were reported to have asked the prophet to appoint a special day for them so as to learn from him because the men have taken most of the time. On this, the Prophet after realizing the great significance of girl-child education, responded positively and said: “Your time is in the house of so and so (one of the women)”. This was where he used to come to them and teach them (Ibn Hajar, 2007). There were other women and girls of high repute in knowledge apart from [ؓ]Aishah, the wife of the Prophet such as [ؓ]Aishah the daughter of Talhah, Fatimah the daughter of al-Samarqandi, Karimah bint Ahmad al-Maruziyyah and others too numerous to be mentioned as more than seven hundred were reported and recorded to have learnt and narrated hadith from the Prophet (Al-Hashimi, 1998:136-137). Some of the early Muslim women were teachers, doctors, writers and poets (FOMWAN, n.d.).

Furthermore, the Sokoto caliphate in Nigeria under the leadership of Shaikh Uthman Dan Fodiyo restored the right of women to education after it had been taken away from them by the ignorant Muslim of the era. His wife Aisha, sisters and daughters were famous for their learning and knowledge. For example, Nana Asma’u, the daughter of Usman Dan Fodiyo was a poet, writer and teacher and used to mobilize the Muslim girls and women in the community (FOMWAN, n.d). Al-Hashimi (1998) said about the Muslim women of high level of knowledge that:

Aishah, the other wives of the prophet, the daughter of Sa’id bin al-Musayyab, Fatimah al-Samarqandi and other famous women scholars were not something unique or rare among Muslim women. There were innumerable learned women, who studied every branch of knowledge and became prominent in many fields.

Based on the above discussion, it is clear that Islam, as a religion, is not a barrier or an impediment to the educational development of either the girl-child or the women. The lackadaisical attitudes of some Muslim parents today towards girl-child education is not originated from either the Qur’an or the Sunnah of the Prophet which are the two primary sources of rules and regulations in Islam. It is rather from their whims and caprices which are not acceptable as proof in the religion. It should also be noted that the assertion that the use of purdah i.e. veil and Hijab are debarring the women and the girl-child respectively from learning is nothing but baseless as the early

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women were in the same mode of dressing which did not stop or prevent them from becoming prominent in their field of learning.

Factors Militating Against the Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

The factors standing as obstacles to the progress of girl-child education in Nigeria vary from one place or zone to another. The problems faced by some girls in a particular area of the six geo-political zones may be different from those encountered by other girls in other zones. These factors shall be discussed generally taking into consideration the common and peculiar factors. However, the discussion shall be under the following sub-headings:

(a) **Social Factors:** The society in which the girls are living is a major impediment to the progress of girl-child education. The adoption of western civilization and culture in the society has brought about moral decadence among the teenagers such as truancy as identified by Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008). Immoral dressing is another social factor which is capable of causing sexual assault on the girls either from their teachers, male counterparts or community members.

Likewise, some girls are fond of having fun in the social clubs of which action has been identified by the Action Aid (2012: 14-16) as an obstacle. This later attitude debars them from continuing their education. It has been recorded in the end line report of 2012 that majority of the girls (84%) in surveyed states of the nation joined clubs just for fun activities. Also, broken home, according to Okeke et al (2008) is another obstacle that is preventing the girl-child from pursuing their education. Another important point is child abuse or child labour whereby the parents will send out their daughters to hawk or work as house-helps while other girls are in the school for their education. Some of the girls even become pregnant early and as a result abandon their education.

(b) **Economic Factors:** There is no gain saying the fact that majority (61%) of Nigerians are living in abject poverty which make it difficult for the children in a particular family to enroll or continue their education. In this situation, the girls are withdrawn from school to engage in petty business so as to cater for the boy-child education. Some girls are prevented from continuing their education because of lack of sponsorship as many of them cannot combine education with job.

In addition, some schools are charging their parents exorbitantly for school fees until recently when the government made the basic education free for every citizen. Also, in the quest for more money to cater for the family, some withdraw their female children from school to labour.

(c) **Religious Factor:** There is no religion that will not want its adherents to be educated as the religion itself is based on knowledge. However, religious discrimination and sentiment are making some people to prevent others especially the girl child from being educated. For instance, Muslim girl-child will not want to enroll in missionary school for the fear of changing her faith as, majority of the schools are owned by the missionary not until recently when Muslim organizations are establishing private schools for the Muslim children.

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Islam, as a religion, is a code of conduct and a way of life that entails and promotes good moral which if obeyed and followed strictly can bring about positive changes in the education of female children. Therefore, based on the discussion on the factors militating against it in Nigeria, the following Islamic values can be utilized in promoting girl-child education in Nigeria:

- i. **Justice and Equality:** These are values that can be used to encourage the girl-child in continuing and enrolling for education in the country. The boy-child should not be given preference over the girl-child in the educational activities as this will make them to feel not belonging to the society. The giving of honour and preference should be based on merit as Allah says in Q49:13

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa (i.e. piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, Well-Acquainted (with all things).

The female children feel dejected and uncared for compared to their male counterpart. The principle of justice and equality will bridge the gaps between the treatment of boys and that of the girls.

- (ii) **Decent Dressing:** Another impediment to girl-child education in Nigeria is the mode of dressing of the girl which is sexually seductive thus leading to sexual harassment and unwanted pregnancy. Islam, as a religion, provides the principle of covering the nudity which entails the bosom and the bottom including the legs. By this, the girl will cover the seductive part of her body which can make the teacher harass her sexually.

The kind of cloth put on by the girl-child is sexually attractive to the teacher. By this, the mode of dressing i.e. uniform should be designed and monitored in a way that it will entail the following features:

- (a) It should not be body fitted
- (b) It should not be transparent

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- (c) It should cover the bosom
- (d) If it is a skirt, it should extend beyond the knee and if it is a trouser, the top should go below the bosom.
- (e) The girls should avoid making up while going to school as this will attract the opposite sex.

All the above features are based on the Quranic injunctions in Q7:26

O children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your private parts and as an adornment; and the raiment of righteousness, that is better. Such are among the Ayāt (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations e.t.c) of Allah, that they may remember (i.e. leave falsehood and follow truth).

Also, in another verse, Allah says:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies (i.e. screen themselves completely except the eyes or an eye to see the way). That will be better, that they should be known (as free respectable women) so as not to be annoyed. And Allah is Ever oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

- (iii) **Charity:** This will cater for poverty as an impediment to girl-child education. Islam encourages the well to do people to give out from their provisions to those in need. This is because Islam does not support and permit the concentration of wealth into the hands of the minority while the majority is suffering as in the case of Nigeria.
- (iv) **Religious Tolerance:** Islam, as a religion, recognizes the existence of other religions as well as accords them the chances and privilege to co-operate in a society provided individual differences are noted and put into consideration. Thus, it tries to co-exist with them in a peaceful and harmonious way in the same society.
With this religious tolerance, the impediment of religious discrimination and sentiment which are preventing the girl-child from enrolling into the only missionary school in their environment will be erased.
- (v) **Early Marriage:** This, if the girl is matured will curb any immorality that can be perpetrated against her from the opposite sex. It will also assert her to be focused on her education. It should however be noted that, this early marriage is not a point that can stop the continuity of the girls education except if misused through whims and caprices. There were lots of early married women that continued their

education after their marriage. Some of them even started their education after marriage. Therefore, marriage is not an impediment to female education but a factor that will assist their learning.

Conclusions

So far, this paper has revealed that the status of girl-child education in Nigeria is very low in the Northern part of the country when compared to the south-western parts of the nation. The factors that are standing as obstacles to the development and progress of girl-child education in Nigeria have been identified and discussed. These factors include social factors, which include broken homes, social clubs, adoption of western civilization and culture, Economic Factor which include poverty and Religious factor which include religious discrimination and sentiment.

In the light of the above, the writer strongly recommends that the Islamic values mentioned in the paper should be incorporated into the educational system of the country so as to reform the attitude of both the parents and the female children towards education. The incorporation of these values into the system will go a long way in shaping not only the moral of the girls but also that of their teachers and the members of the society.

According to UNICEF (2007), Nigeria is among the countries where the number of girls that opt-out from school is more than the number of boys. However, there is an improvement in the girls' attitude toward education as many of them are willing to be educated according to the endline report of the transformation education for girls in Nigeria (Action aid, 2012).

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