



Chapter Four - Problems and Solutions of Muslim Girls' Child Education in Nigeria

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Chapter Four

Problems and Solutions of Muslim Girls' Child Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

In *Chapter Four*, Al-amin identifies the challenges hindering the state of girls' education in Nigeria and proposes possible solutions to these problems. He concludes that the Nigerian government needs to implement policies that promote equal opportunities for girls' education, invest in infrastructure development, and prioritise education in the country's budget allocation. Non-governmental organisations should also partner with government agencies to provide scholarships and support services to girls from impoverished backgrounds. He finally suggests that cultural and traditional practices that discriminate against the girl-child need to be addressed through sensitization campaigns and community-based interventions.



Introduction

Education refers to the provision of skills and rationale for thinking and exposing its beneficiaries to the understanding of positive change. It can liberate minds, and increase the power of rationality so that chaos, restlessness, greed, and aimlessness can be reduced and illuminated in the lifestyle of individuals and groups.¹ Education is a weapon for acquiring skills, relevant knowledge and habits for surviving in the character and moral training, development of sound attitude, development in a child, and the ability to adapt to his changing environment as stressed in the National Policy on Education.² In fact, education is the most critical driving force in the growth of human civilization. Therefore, the success of any nation and economy depends solely on the roles of critical skills, knowledge, intelligence and know-how of the population within the society, and the economy. The basic roles of the education sector therefore are to develop and supply the skilled manpower required for the revitalization and development to take place.

Education is therefore universally seen and accepted as the bedrock of any individual in all ramifications regardless of gender³ and that is the reason it is considered one of the fundamental human rights recognized by the United Nations, which means, education is a right that every child should have access to, irrespective of gender. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with a population of over 200 million people. The country is rich in cultural diversity and has over 250 ethnic groups. Despite the cultural and linguistic diversity, the country is united in the pursuit of education. Education is highly valued in Nigeria, and there is a widespread belief that it is the key to success. However, despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government to promote education for all, there are still significant gaps in the education of girls in Nigeria. In Nigeria, girls' education has been characterised by various challenges, including poverty, early marriage, gender discrimination, lack of adequate educational infrastructure, and insurgent activities. These challenges have contributed to low enrolment and high dropout rates among girls. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that over 10 million children are out of school in Nigeria, with girls accounting for more than half of the figure (UNESCO, 2018). This study aims to review the challenges facing girls' education in Nigeria and provide possible solutions.

¹ Barakatu 2013, 29.

² NPE 2004.

³ Mohammed 2009, 66,



The Position of Islam on Muslim Girls' Child Education

Islam regards the seeking of knowledge as an ethical essential, vital, and endeavour highly pleasing to Allah. From the Qur'an viewpoint, knowledge is not limited to learning through reason or the senses. Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge requires the total participation of the seeker with the total reality. To seek knowledge is a sacred duty and is mandatory for every Muslim both male and female. This can be attested in the Hadith of our Noble Prophet Muhammad. Allah says: "Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who are endowed with understanding that receive admonition."⁴ More so, several Hadith traditions also talk directly about education being obligatory and binding. The Prophet said: "Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim (both male and female)."⁵ Abu Sa'id Kudri reported that women said to the Prophet "Man has gone ahead of us (in terms of acquiring knowledge)." Therefore, "appoint a special day for our benefit as well. The Prophet fixed one day for them, he would meet them on that day, advise them and as well educate them about the commandments of Allah."⁶

Gender inequality is a common accusation made against Islam and a disparity in educational opportunities between males and females. This education is seen as one of the pivotal factors in determining the economic, social and political advancement of a society and if those who make up over fifty per cent of that society are denied such basic fundamental rights activists will seek to find reason for this disparity. It has also been noticed in many parts of Africa and SouthEast Asia that, women's acquisition of knowledge is either fervently opposed, regulated to secondary importance as compared to men are encumbered with so many impossible for female students to acquire a decent standard of education with the belief that women education ends in the kitchen. This belief made some parents neglect the education of their female children. This is a sad reflection upon Muslims and the society that had been built since knowledge is one of the important pillars upon which the edifice of Islam was raised.

However, if the doors of acquiring knowledge are closed for women or unjustified restrictions are imposed upon this acquisition, which religion will they act upon? How can they come to know the nature of the verses that have been revealed to them? How are they going to impact the fundamentals of the faith to their children if they do not know of it? Women are the future movers, and shakers of society, they

⁴ Qur'an 39:9

⁵ Narrated by Ibn Majah (1:81, No. 5224).

⁶ Sahih Bukhari.



are like Gold amid other natural resources and have a major role to play in keeping and maintaining the family as well as a source of peace, tranquillity, and the psychological stability of man and society at large. They were also the leaders and the moulders of the character of the newborn baby, the first teachers, sustainers, and maintainers of every household. If females are left behind, then it will make society poor and backward. The whole race of Muslims may be left uneducated. The holy Prophet was reported to have said: “If you educate a man, you have educated an individual but if you educate a woman, you have educated the whole society.”

This is because females are the principal parts of a family's success. Aisha Bint Abubakar (mother of the faithful) was one of the jurists, scholars, teachers, and intellectuals of great standing and one of the greatest transmitters of the Hadith was of course a female who did it behind a screen in her home. She was recognized as an expert in several fields. The history of Islam is related to the mentions of women who obtained distinguished positions in the field of Hadith, science of interpretation, jurisprudence, medical sciences, poetry calligraphy.

In fact, if a nation wishes to be successful and move towards a sustainable reality, the woman of that society must be given every opportunity to attain knowledge and education which is not only her due but the right had been ordained to her by Allah.

Muslim Girls' Child Education in Nigeria

The provision of access to functional quality education is a constitutional right of all Nigerian citizens irrespective of gender, age, race, religion and region; and one of the national educational policy objectives is to ensure the provision of universal access to education from primary through university which has been the prime target of educational endeavours in Nigeria. According to the constitution, education is right for all at all levels. The need to educate all the citizens of Nigeria was not only on the policy agenda of the British colonial government. As a result of this educational opportunities were restricted under colonial rule. In the southern part of the country, missionaries established educational institutions to assist them in propagating the religion of Christianity. Similarly in the northern part, Arabic schools were established to assist in propagating Islam. The access to functional quality education for Muslim girls has been improved since the mid-1970s when the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme was launched in 1976.⁷

⁷ Obanya 2005 in Tijjani and Jiyah 2012, 25.



II. The Problems of Muslim Girls' Child Education in Nigeria

Despite the efforts of the Nigerian government to promote education for all, the education of girls in Nigeria still faces several challenges. Some of the problems of Muslim girls' child education in Nigeria are:

Poverty: Poverty is one of the major challenges hindering girls' education in Nigeria.⁸ Poverty has made it difficult for many families to afford necessities such as school uniforms, textbooks, and tuition fees.⁹ In many cases, families prefer to send their male children to school instead of their female counterparts. This preference is due to the belief that investing in boys' education will yield better returns, as they are likely to support the family financially in the future. In relation to this, many families cannot afford to send their daughters to school, and girls are often seen as a financial burden. This has resulted in many girls being forced to drop out of school to work and contribute to the family income. Poverty, therefore, has been one of the major obstacles to girl's education in Nigeria.¹⁰

Early marriage: Early marriage is another significant challenge facing girls' education in Nigeria.¹¹ Early marriage is prevalent in Nigeria, and many girls are forced into marriage before they reach the age of 18. This often leads to girls dropping out of school to become wives and mothers, which results in them missing out on the opportunity to complete their education. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa, with 44% of girls married off before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2020). Early marriage deprives girls of their right to education, as they are often expected to assume domestic responsibilities and bear children instead of attending school.

Gender-based violence: Gender-based violence is a significant problem in Nigeria, and it has a direct impact on the education of girls. Girls who experience gender-based violence are often too traumatised to attend school, and they may drop out altogether.

Gender Discrimination: Gender discrimination is also a significant challenge facing girls' education in Nigeria. Some cultural and traditional practices discriminate against girls, limiting their access to education. For instance, in some communities,

⁸ Mohammed 2009, 72.

⁹ Mohammed 2009, 72.

¹⁰ Mohammed 2009, 72.

¹¹ Mohammed 2009, 72-3.



girls are not allowed to attend school during their menstrual cycle and are also expected to stay at home to perform domestic chores.

Lack of access to education: In some parts of Nigeria, there is a lack of access to education for girls.¹² Schools are often far from their homes, and transportation is expensive. Additionally, many schools lack basic amenities such as toilets and clean water, which makes it difficult for girls to attend school.

Religious and Cultural Beliefs: Some religious and cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria discourage girls from attending school. For example, in some parts of Nigeria, girls are expected to stay at home and take care of the household, while boys are sent to school.¹³ There is also a wrong notion that if a female is highly educated, it may be difficult to find a good husband.¹⁴

Poor Educational Infrastructure: Poor educational infrastructure is another significant challenge hindering girls' education in Nigeria. Many schools lack basic amenities such as adequate classrooms, electricity, water supply, and toilets. In some cases, schools are located far from the communities, making it difficult for girls to attend school.

Insurgent Activities: Insurgent activities such as terrorism and banditry have also affected girls' education in Nigeria. The activities of Boko Haram, a terrorist group that is opposed to Western education, have led to the closure of several schools in the northeast region of the country. The group has also abducted hundreds of schoolgirls, with some of them still in captivity.

III. The Solutions to Muslim Girls' Child Education in Nigeria

Nigeria has made significant progress in increasing access to education for girls in recent years, but there are still many challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that all girls in Nigeria have equal access to quality education. Here are some potential solutions to improve girls' education in Nigeria:

Increase access to education: The Nigerian government needs to invest more resources into expanding access to education for girls. This could involve building more schools, providing transportation to and from the school, and offering scholarships to girls who would otherwise not be able to afford to attend school.

¹² Mohammed 2009, 73.

¹³ Mohammed 2009, 73.

¹⁴ Mohammed 2009, 73.



Eliminate gender-based violence: Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault, can discourage girls from attending school. The Nigerian government needs to take steps to eliminate gender-based violence and provide support and protection to girls who are victims of violence.

Improve the quality of education: Improving the quality of education in Nigeria is critical to ensuring that girls receive a good education. This could involve training teachers to teach effectively, providing resources such as textbooks and technology, and improving school infrastructure.

Increase awareness and advocacy: Raising awareness about the importance of girls' education and advocating for policies and programs that support girls' education is critical to increasing access to education for girls in Nigeria. This could involve working with local community leaders, religious leaders, and parents to change attitudes about girls' education.

Engage parents and communities: Engaging parents and communities in girls' education is crucial to ensuring that girls have support and encouragement to attend and complete school. This could involve holding community meetings and workshops, partnering with local organisations, and involving parents in school activities.

Provide mentoring and role models: Providing mentoring and role models to girls can help to inspire and motivate them to pursue their education. This could involve pairing girls with successful female professionals or older female students who can provide guidance and support.

IV. Conclusion

The problems of Muslim girls' child education in Nigeria are complex and multifaceted. Poverty, early marriage, gender-based violence, lack of access to education, and cultural barriers are some of the factors that contribute to these challenges. Addressing these issues will require a coordinated effort from the Nigerian government, civil society organisations, and the international community. It is only by working together that we can ensure that every girl in Nigeria has access to quality education and the opportunity to achieve her full potential. Overall, improving girls' education in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the multiple barriers that prevent girls from attending and completing



school. By investing in girls' education, Nigeria can improve the lives of individual girls and women and also contribute to the development of the country as a whole.



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About the Author



Usman Al-amin, PhD, is a lecturer in the Department of History, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria. He received his B.A. and M.A. in social and intellectual history from the University of Maiduguri. Dr. Al-amin bagged his Ph.D. from the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg. A specialist in the documentation and history of Arabic Literature, Sufi traditions, and Islamic manuscript cultures, his main fields of research include Islamic

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