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| Contents | Pages |
|--|-------|
| 1. The Girl-child and Gender-based violence: Implication on the educational performance and Women empowerment by Kanu, Judith Amaka | 1-9 |
| 2. Building positive parent-teacher relationship for better Educational Performance of a Girl-child: Implication for Counselling by Adeyemi, Adetola O. Ph.D | 10-19 |
| 3. Crop protection practices: a vehicle for sustainable quality food supply in a terrorized nation by Jury, Esther Jonah & Bamaiyi, I. J. | 20-27 |
| 4. Sexual Abuse of the Girl-Child: Implication for Counselling and Educational Practices by Adebunmi O. Alade | 28-36 |
| 5. Impact of violence on the education of the Girl-child in Nigeria: Implication for Curriculum planners, by Hannatu Jacob & Dr. D. N. Damar | 37-43 |
| 6. A comparative study of the effects of Single sex and Co-educational schools on the performance of students: in some selected schools in Kafanchan Inspectorate Division of Kaduna State by Safiya J. Garba & Anna I. Sarki | 44-52 |
| 7. The menace of Boko Haram insurgency and fundamentalism: A hindrance to Girl-child education in Northern Nigeria by Grace Christopher Atama | 53-59 |
| 8. Meeting the challenges of Girl-child education through Science, Technology and Mathematics (STM) Education by Dr. Philomina Ifeanyi Onwuka & Desmond Ekokotu | 60-64 |
| 9. School-gender type, class and age as predictors of female students' performance in Mathematics by Oluwole, D. O. & Lawal, R. F. | 65-73 |

BUILDING POSITIVE PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP FOR BETTER EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF A GIRL CHILD: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

by

Adeyemi, Adetola O. Ph.D*

Abstract

*Noting the importance of the parent teacher relationship to improving the educational performance of the girl-child, this paper discusses building parent-teacher relationship for better performance of a girl-child. Included in the discussion are **conceptual issues in girl-child and education**, importance of girl-child education, **problems with the girl-child education** and problems of performance of the girl-child in education. The role of positive parent-teacher relationship was emphasised and the "hows" of building positive parent-teacher relationship was discoursed. The characteristics of positive parent-teacher relationship by which it can be identified were itemised and **implications** of positive parent-teacher relationship to counselling was presented. It was recommended that Counselling psychologists should be available within the educational institutions to help teachers create the needed relationship with parents. Also, Counsellors should be involved in the lives of the females right from the creche to nursery, primary school and all around and that the female should be caught young with counselling give them appropriate and right information to boost their self image and consequently their performance.*

Introduction

Girls had been the victims of disparity and inequality in many sectors of the society including education. This inequality is obvious in the enrolment, retention and performance of the girl-child in the sector. It worth noting that numerous treaties have affirmed the equal right of girls and boys to a complete quality basic education and the global community has recognized girls' education as perhaps the single best investment for development. Despite this, girls tend to fall through the cracks in education systems around the world. Also, the idea of a universal education remained unfulfilled and gender gap persists (Ocholi, 2002).

Meanwhile, admitting the need for such an interaction is not in question and in fact it has reached a higher level of acceptance today as a key factor in improving schools, however "acceptance does not always translate into implementation, commitment, or creativity (Drake, 2000, p. 34).

While the value of the parent-teacher relationship is universally accepted, it is not always easy to promote or maintain. Central to this challenge is educators' and administrators' uncertainty about initiating and maintaining relationship that is meaningful and mutually beneficial for the school, the family, and the student especially the girl child.

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Conceptual Issues in Girl-Child and Education

The convention of the rights of child defines "child" as any one below the age of 18. The girl-child is a female homo sapiens of unmarried age that is defined by the anatomical and physiological characteristics that set her apart from her male counterpart. As a compound noun, the term connotes the sex and age bracket of the gender under reference. 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 creche, nursery or early childhood (0 to 5 years), primary (6 to 12 years) and secondary school (12 to 18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adults who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings. It is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on the significant others, those on whom she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to the peak at the young adult stage (Fishe-Orideji 2001; Ibrahim 2004; Offorma (2009).

Onyekwelu (2005) sees education as a tool that —teaches someone how to think, what is good and what is bad, how to solve problems, to know what is fair and unfair, rational and irrational.... He avers that education imbues an individual with the confidence to adapt anywhere; it builds self-esteem and self-respect, it brings out the best in you and enables you to assert yourself positively, and most importantly, education helps one to identify his/her strengths and weaknesses. In fact, education encapsulates all these definitions and benefits because the end product is the emergence of a mentally liberated individual that is free to make decisions for him/her and shape his/her life, be self-reliant and contribute to national and community development.

All of the above seem to underscore Nigeria's National Education Policy (2004) thrust which seeks to, among other things, create and promote — self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. Girl child education is part of the gender issues in education. Girls in developing countries particularly Nigeria live in environments, societies and culture; that are diverse. Yet, their disadvantaged situation is basically similar wherever they might live. They are more likely to be born into discrimination, be undervalued in comparison to their brothers, be exploited and considered transitory members of their families and serve as helpers to their over-burdened mothers from a very early stage (African Centre for Women, 1998).

Meanwhile, for a girl child to become a proper and useful adult, she needs both informal and qualitative formal educations. These will enable her to develop her mind, intellects and skill to be able to contribute meaningfully to her society. Education prepares a person, especially; girl child, to fit properly into the web of social interaction and equally enhance better performance in the social roles in the society. Education, according to Offorma (2008), is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person, particularly the girl-child, to help her develop

physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. That is why, in university setting at graduation ceremonies, one hears the Vice-Chancellors pronounce these words while awarding degrees to their institutions' graduates,

"... you have been found worthy in character and learning..."

In education parlance, it means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and effective behaviours to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviours are the focus of training individuals in institutions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education. The programme is organized, planned and systematically implemented. In an informal education, there is no plan and the training is haphazard and incidental (Ocho 1988; Charmes 1998; Francis 2000; Offorma, 2009). Ocho (2005) asserted that education involves a process through which individuals are made functional members of their society; as it is a process through which the young person acquires knowledge and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to him/herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society education connotes acquisition of something good and worthwhile.

Importance of Girl-child education

The dividends of education for a girl-child are numerous to mention. Investment in girl education benefits the individual, society, and the world as a whole. At the individual level, this is seen in better management of the home environment, effective use of health services, application of improved hygiene and nutrition practices, reduced fertility, lower child mortality, longer life expectancy, better child health care, smaller families and better educated children. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) revealed that girls' education does not only bring the immediate benefits of empowering girls, but is seen as the best investment in a country's development. Education for the girl-child also provides the opportunity for the development of essential skills such as self-confidence, effective participation in educational activities, protection against HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and self-reliance among others.

When a girl gets the opportunity to learn by accessing and remaining in good quality schooling it has a transformative effect not only on her own life chances and the realization of her human rights, but also on the wider social and economic environment (Herz and Spurline 2004, UNDP 1995, The Girl Effect 2010, ASPBAE 2010). Educating girls is the key to ensuring improved mother and child health, community development and economic growth

Specifically the benefits of the girl child education among many others are seen in the following:

Health: A girl who goes to school is likely to become sexually active at a later age, can make more informed, empowered choices, is less vulnerable, and is more likely to require her partner to use a condom (VandemoorteleandDelamonica 2000, Basic Education Coalition

2004). For a girl in Africa completing basic education makes her three times less likely to contract HIV (CAMPED 2010). A girl who has gone to school has more control over her reproductive life and is more likely to use contraception to space her pregnancies at healthy intervals (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen 2004). She is also likely to have a smaller family: women with seven or more years of schooling have between two to four fewer children than women who have not been to school (World Bank 1993, Colclough and Lewin 1993, Summers 1994).

Prioritizing girls' education also protects the next generation against Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, for example in Tanzania girls are three and a half times less likely, and in the Cote D'Ivoire, girls are five times less likely, to undergo Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting if their mothers have gone to school (UNICEF 2005a).

Child survival: Quite simply, the more educated the mother, the healthier she and her child are likely to be. Since 1970, half of the reduction in child mortality under age 5 in 175 countries was due to improvements in the education of women of reproductive age (Gakidou, Cowling, Lozano and Murray, 2010). Children whose mothers have completed basic education are 40% less likely to die in childhood compared to those whose mothers have not been to school (Watkins 2001). They are also twice as likely to survive past the age of five (Bicego and Ahmad 1996) and half as likely to be malnourished (Save The Children 2005). They will have twice the chance of being fully immunized (UNICEF 2005), and are twice as likely to go to school themselves (UNICEF 2005).

Economic empowerment: Education enables girls and women to access better and safer employment. One extra year of primary school boosts a girl's eventual wages by 10-20% (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos 2002) and the impact of this increased earning potential is multiplied because women and girls make good use of the money they earn, reinvesting 90% into their families compared to just 30-40% for men (Fortson, 2003). The economic impact is also felt on a macro-scale as increasing women's education leads to increased national growth: only a 1% increase in the number of women with secondary education can increase a country's annual per capita income growth by 0.3% (PLAN 2008). On a global level, PLAN (2008) provides a striking estimate: \$92 billion annual earnings are forfeited by 65 low and middle income and transitional countries as a result of failing to educate girls to the same level as boys. This annual loss is not far short of the \$128.7 billion annually provided by donors as Official Development Assistance (ODA), suggesting that the gains to be made in educating girls are on par with the investment in ODA by donors.

Problems with the Girl-Child education

The **problems with the Girl-Child education in Nigeria have their roots in** the erroneous conceptualisation of the role of females in the society to child bearing and housekeeping. This is why in most developing countries, males are sent to schools and groomed for career in technical and scientific fields while females are guided to concentrate their efforts on home economics when sent to school. In Nigeria, the social relations and activities of Nigerian women and men are governed by patriarchal system of socialization and cultural practices, which favour the interest of men above those of women. The women are in subordinate position particularly at the community and household levels and the male children are preferred to the females.

Though, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2007) identified poverty, early marriage and teenage pregnancy; inadequate school infrastructure; cultural and religious biases; gender bias in content and teaching and learning processes; poorly qualified teachers among others as some of the barriers to girl-child education. These entire barriers stem out as appendages of the root issue of erroneous conceptualisation of the role of females in the society to child bearing and housekeeping. If not, why is that the barriers are not affecting the boys as much as they are affecting the girls?

A large body of research on access to school and progression to upper classes around most African countries consistently confirm that girls considerably outnumbered boys in Early Childhood Education and lower primary with the reverse being noticed in transition to upper primary and secondary school levels where boys overtake the girls (Mwaniki & Orodho, 2014; Orodho, 2013). With regards to participation, there is growing concerns that girls have continuously under-performed in national examinations in upper classes compared to boys (Orodho, 2014).

As a consequence of the foregoing, identifying factors that influence students' learning and thus achievement continues to be an important objective of educators at all levels (Njeru & Orodho, 2003). Various factors affect student achievement at secondary education level like personal confidence and a feeling of competence in learning; hopeful but realistic projection into the future occupational roles and social roles; emotional stability; temperamental tendency towards introversion; relative independence from teachers and a tacit acceptance of the of the curricula: and work demands arising within the structure of tuition (Mwaniki & Orodho. 2014). The girl child had been disadvantaged on many of these factors thus resulting in problem of performance and consequently progression for the girls.

Problems of performance of the Girl-child in education

Although achieving gender parity is a prerequisite for gender equality, it constitutes a poor proxy on its own for assessing genuine progress in this regard (Unterhalter, North and Exley 2010, Wilson 2003). It remains a useful comparative indicator because the data is widely available and easily calculated, but it fails to provide insight regarding which girls are enrolled, whether they stay attending, what they learn whilst they are in school and what they are able to do with their education once they leave (Unterhalter, North and Exley 2010). The reality behind an apparently sunny picture is showing that once girls get into school they face numerous challenges and are far less likely than boys to keep attending, achieve learning outcomes, and make progress to higher levels of education.

Similarly, Achunine (2007) stated that empowering women intellectually, socially and politically using education as an instrument is imperative for redressing gender imbalance and enhancing the participation of women in decision making, family life, community development and nation building. This can be achieved not only through improved enrolment but through retention and performance of female gender in schools. Yet millions of girls around the world are still denied their right to a full and empowering education. The improved awareness of the significant role of education has brought about increase in school enrolment and literacy level among girls,

particularly in developing countries, but disparity remains an issue between boys and girls in their performance level especially in sciences and technology, and also between men and women in career choice and workforce (Salman, Olawoye & Yahaya, 2011)

Consistent with this, educators and researchers have long been interested in exploring variables contributing to the quality of academic performance of girl learners. Academic performance is affected by a number of factors including age, gender, geographical belongingness, ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES), parents' education level, parental profession, language, income and religious affiliations and school background (Hlupo and Tsikira, 2012; Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango, 2009). Home environment has been recognized as having a lot of influence on academic performance. The family being the first and major agency of socialisation has a great influence and bearing on the development of the child (Threlfall, Seay and Kohl, 2013). Adeyemo (2006) as cited in Ganga and Chinyoka (2010) explained that the child's first place of contact with the world is the family. The child as a result acquires initial education and socialisation from parents and other significant others in the family, thus the parents are indeed the child's first educators. Parent involvement has been found to be related to increased academic performance (Hill & Craft, 2003). Thus there is the need to foster positive parent-teacher relationships in the educational institutions to improve on the girl-child performance.

The Role of Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

The goal of parent-teacher relationship in education is not merely to get families involved, but rather to connect important contexts for strengthening children's learning and development. There are several reasons for believing that positive parent-teacher relationships are conducive to children's school performance. Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) explain: "When parents communicate constructively with teachers and participate in school activities, they gain a clearer understanding of what is expected of their children at school and they may learn from teachers how to work at home to enhance their children's education". When parents attend parent/teacher conferences, for example, it creates continuity between the two dominant spheres of influence in the child's life, home and school and likely signals to children.

Building Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

Productive parent-teacher relationships can take many forms. Given the influence of context, "parents and teachers working as partners" is a concept, not an exact prescription or prescribed set of steps or activities. Working as partners depends on careful consideration of school-based practices for connecting with families. This is underscored by the fact that schools and teachers alone seldom help students achieve their full academic potential. This is not an indictment of schools and teachers. Rather, this is a fact of child development. Students' personal investment in and interest for learning, for example, are influenced by parental messages (Bempechat, 1998; Coleman, 1987). Therefore, the approach for interacting with families is characterized by focusing on the importance of the relationship and establishing meaningful co-roles for the partners. Working as partners is a way of thinking about how to create constructive connections

between parents and teachers. Forming connections means developing an intentional and ongoing relationship between teachers and parents that is designed to enhance children's reading and learning, and to address the obstacles that impede it. It requires delivery of the right message: "that mutual respect and interdependence of home, school, and the community are essential to children's development" (McAfee. 1993, p. 21)

It is beneficial for teachers to think about the following: What kind of relationship is desired in this parent-student-teacher context? What are the rights of parents, students, and teachers? What are the roles and responsibilities of parents, students, and teachers? What are the resources each brings to enhance learning experiences and reading outcomes for students?

Characteristics of Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

Both parents and teachers have an important role to play; their roles do not replace but rather complement and reinforce the other's role, thus providing the girl child with a consistent message about her performance in education. Thinking of parents and teachers as "partners" refers to this mutual effort toward a shared goal. It also implies shared responsibility of parents and teachers for supporting students as learners especially the girl child (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Effective parent-teacher partnerships are reciprocal, on-going, and balanced (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Parent-teacher communication is a key component of parent-teacher partnerships. Effective communication flows in both directions. Teachers recognize families have unique knowledge of their children. Parents recognize teachers have access to resources less available to them. Parent-teacher communication is challenging, yet critical, to building positive relationships and supportive connections between home and child care (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Implications of Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship to Counselling

The issue of creating positive-teacher relationship is majorly a behavioural one. Discussions so far have implications for counsellors. Thus counselling which is a helping relationship that helps individuals to change their attitude or perspective for better outcome is highly desirable. Fuster (2000) posits that counselling is neither giving of advice nor offering solutions to problems, but helping counselees to change their attitude, perception of self or others or of habits. He further adds that there is no permanent solution to a problem without some change in the counselees.

So counsellors can help parties involved to resolve attitudinal and perception issues which are serving as clog in the wheels of fostering positive parent-teacher relationship in the schools. Gender issues in relation to the retention and of performance needs the girl-child could also be resolved with the help of the counsellors' interventions. In other words the parents, teachers, administrators and the girl child can be empowered through counselling to handle their situations through proper reorientation and self-assertion. Sensitization could be done by professional counsellors through conferences, seminars and workshops (Ogah, 2000).

Also, the counsellor should aim at addressing the erroneous conceptualisation of the role of females in the society to child bearing and housekeeping. This should be done having all the parties involved as the target audience. This is to ensure that a consistent and reinforcing message is passed to the girl-child by all.

Conclusion

The equal right of girls and boys to a complete quality basic education have been affirmed the global community. However, gap still exists academic performance of the girl child though there remarkable improvement in enrolment. To close this gap, efforts must be gear, "Towards improving the performance of the girl-child and not only enrolment in school. Achieving this require collaborative efforts of all stakeholders and particularly of parents and teachers. Thus a positive parent-teacher relationship should be created and this should be characterised by mutual respect and interdependence between the parents and teachers. Also, the roles of parents and teachers should be complementary and not competitive and reinforcing the other's role, thus providing the girl child with a consistent message about her performance in education. A shared responsibility of parents and teachers for supporting students as learner-especially the girl child is essential and should be reciprocal, on-going, and balanced. A key component of this relationship is the parent-teacher communication which should be good and flow in both directions.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made on the basis of the discussions in this paper:

- (1) Counselling psychologists should be available within the educational institutions to help teachers create the needed relationship with parents. They will be of help to them in counselling with them for a change of attitude towards more involvement of parents in the education of their girls;
- (2) Counsellors should be involved in the lives of the females right from the creche to nursery, primary school and all around. The female should be caught young with counselling give them appropriate and right information to boost their self image and consequently their performance.

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