

# Social and Cultural Impediments to Girl Child Education Among the Tiv People of Benue State: Counselling Implications

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## Abstract

Household discriminatory practices on the girl-child have drawn attention worldwide due to deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs, values and practices. This paper examines the socio-cultural impediments to the education of the girl child among the Tiv people of Benue State and efforts by the Nigerian government through policies that will alleviate poverty, discrimination practices, religious factors, early betrothal of the girl-child and parental attitude. The girl-child is discriminated by virtue of sex, the structure of the society, its values, traditions and institutions that have in-built discriminatory practices against women. Reviewing these practices in line with government set interventions shows that these policies even though are available in Benue State, they are still far from being implemented in practice. The paper discussed the transactional Analysis which is rooted in a philosophy that is anti - deterministic and asserts that human beings are capable of transcending their conditions through early programming Re-deciding entails assisting the girl child to re-write and employ strokes to develop a true sense of trust in the world and a sense of self-worth. It concludes that counselling remains an anti-dot for changing the perceptions of parents and the society at large towards girl child education. The paper recommends interventions for girl - child education and elimination of discriminatory practices in the society.

**Keywords:** Girl child Education, Social-cultural impediments, Strokes, Script Analysis, Transactional Analysis.

## Introduction

Education is seen as a social mechanism designed to bring about social living skills and attitudes that are judged to be useful and desirable in the society. The Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Policy on Education (2016) states that every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of one's ability and /or disabilities. Development through education has indeed been a major pursuit in the globalization process and the progress in education (Gyuse and Ojo, 2010). Among the Tiv people of Benue, education is seen as step toward progress and a big industry for development. This is because of the potentials education has

in facilitating development as well as in shaping the lives of many individuals in Tiv-land. There is a conviction among the Tiv people that education is an important factor as well as an indispensable capital for the transformation of any society.

According to Aja-Okorie, (2013), many people, especially women are still excluded from education in many parts of Nigeria including the Tiv people of Benue State. The girl-child is discriminated by virtue of sex, the structure of the society, its values, traditions and institutions that have in-built discriminatory practices against women. Among the Tiv people, societal recognition of the value of education has

been displaced as a result of socio-cultural practices, ignorance, economic stagnation characterized by pervasive poverty which has virtually weakened all sectors of development. Furthermore, inefficient and ineffective implementation of the National policies on education contributes to the problem of the girl-child education.

Socio-cultural factors are significant in parental and family decisions on whether to invest in girl-child education. Pervasive gender ideologies at the household and community levels always favour boys over girls and promote differential educational opportunities and outcomes. Socio-cultural beliefs and customs influence decision to enroll girls in schools, to withdraw them from school and decision to drop out of school which affects their academic performance as well as grade level attainment. Also, the socio-cultural expectation of girls and the priority accorded to their future roles as mothers and wives have a strong negative bearing on formal education.

Historically, education in Tivland was based on apprenticeship (Ihugh, 2017). The Tiv people adopted this informal type of education which was based on oral tradition and practical activities. The mothers' responsibility was to ensure that girls are educated on all that she needed to know before marriage. This brand of education focused on domestic life, motherhood, weaving, pottery, farming and other roles that generally fell within the division of labour on the basis of gender. The other aspect of this model of education was informal training to acquire skills that would function effectively in homes as housewives. Tiv traditional education was fashioned to cater for the needs of the immediate family and the society at large. Apparently, there were no special school premises, employed teachers with salaries, text books, exercise

books, pens, pencils, erasers, chalk nor white board makers and boarding facilities (Dzurgba 2007). As a communal responsibility, fathers took it upon themselves to educate the males in societal perceived masculine roles

With the arrival of Britain in Tivland in 1900, colonialism was established as an agent of change. It was not only a system of government but also a way of life (Ihugh, 2017). Colonialism and its antics of capitalism adversely affected gender relationship among Tiv, for instance, division of labour was no more on the basis of sex and age, but followed the rule of capitalist division of labour (Ityavyar 1992). Colonial education was not available to many Tiv people but the condition of women was even worse. Missionaries, who first encouraged Western education tended to educate men and rarely included females. Fathers in turn preferred to give their sons and male relatives to school but gave girls for early marriages, (Mahachi 2003). Formal education in Benue state was directed to men only instead of on individual needs and abilities (Ihugh, 2017). It was assumed that the role of women is for procreation and confinement to kitchen and other domestic chores. This attitude towards female education led parents to think that, it is a wasteful venture to educate the girl child.

The female child who suffers deprivation of education particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will partially remain undeveloped and relegated to the background without a voice, (Salman, 2006). It is commonly said that, when the family invests in women and girls' education, they are investing in people who in turn invest in everybody else. There is therefore, every need to identify the socio-cultural impediments that hamper girl – child education. This is an

opinion paper which will be discussed under the following structured sub-headings: Socio-Cultural Impediments to the Girl Child Education, Government Efforts to Reduce Impediments to the Girl Child Education, Counselling Intervention using the Transactional Analysis (TA)

### **Socio-Cultural Impediments to the Girl Child Education**

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations in its declaration of Human Rights proposed recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. There are still many countries and institutions which discriminate against women and children in spite of this declaration. Household discriminatory practices on the girl-child have drawn attention worldwide due to its deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs, values and practices. This persistent discrimination against women violates the principles of equality and equal rights. The issue of discrimination against the girl-child has remained an unresolved issue in the society and a major concern in academic discourse. In every civilized society and especially in the African context, children are regarded as the pride of the parents and the greatest value the society possesses. This is why children are mostly cherished and consciously protected from all forms of hazards and abuse. However, girl-children have not been so lucky to be cherished, protected and loved in the society due to certain traditional practices, stereotyping, cultural and religious beliefs which put them at the risk of abuse and neglect (Alabi, Bahal and Alabi, 2014). Several socio-cultural factors account for the inhibition of girl -

child education and these are discussed in the following:

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a detestable condition that has no racial, geographical, religious, political and ethnic barrier; it affects every aspect of human existence, socially, physically, mentally and psychologically. For instance, it limits the possibility of the poor from realizing their mental and physical potentials. It destroys aspirations, hopes, happiness, self-esteem, personal competence, tolerance of others and one's disposition to participate in community development. According to UNDP Report (2009), Nigeria has Human Poverty index (HPI) of 36.2% which ranks as 114 out of 135 countries measured.

A study carried out by Benue Health Fund (BHF, 1997) identified Benue State as a State stricken with poverty. This is characterized by small farms, low annual agricultural production per capital and or high food insecurity. With this percentage of poverty, only a few families are able to educate their children while the most vulnerable groups which included women and children had relatively little or no control over access to financial resources unless they engaged heavily in agricultural processing.

Akighir, Ngutsav & Asom (2011) observed that, poverty has been a major feature of the lives of the majority of Benue people. Approximately, 65% of the people live below the poverty line. Department for International Development (DFID, 2002) recorded that Benue State is the 8<sup>th</sup> poorest of the thirty six states of the Federation. The reasons for this are complex, but may in part be the dependence of the state on agriculture, and the government neglect of this sector. Poverty in Benue State is absolute, severe, widespread, multi-dimensional and has

increased in the last decades especially with the present State of insecurity and food insecurity. Ikwuba (2011) stated that the poverty characteristics of the state showed that 79% of the working populations are engaged in agriculture which is not rewarding, since it is mostly at the subsistence level.

Ekejiuba (2011) maintained that women are more hit with poverty because of the disparity in education and the prevalence of early marriage that tend further to impoverish women and subject them to discrimination. Most mothers particularly in the villages prefer street hawking and early marriage than sending their wards to school. In the same vein, family background of the girl determines her chance of attending school, the more educated a parent, the more the attitude to education. Further to this, in most polygamous homes, boys are usually given considerations whenever there are scarce resources for the training of the children. This is corroborated by Ekejiuba (2011) who stated that the issue of poverty has aggravated the situation of girls' lack of access to education because some parents when faced with scarce resources choose to educate boys rather than girls. Sometimes, an intelligent girl is deprived of opportunity to go to school while allowing a less intelligent or less ambitious boy to do so. The implication cuts across economic and social manifestations. With little or no education, capital, access to credit facilities, girls are subordinated perpetually to their husbands for almost everything. This does not only affect the girl-child but also their offspring after marriage and it breeds a cycle of poverty and low education.

### **Parental Attitude**

Most children have two main educators in their lives, parents and school teachers.

Parents are the prime educators until the child starts school and remain a major influence on the child's learning. There is no universal agreement on what parental involvement should be but parents' positive attitude towards the education of the girl child is important in determining school attendance and academic achievement of the child. Traditional beliefs of parents to some extent hamper girl-child education. It ranges from the fact that girls do not perpetuate the family lineage. The female child is regarded as someone that belongs to another family because of marriage. In addition, some girl-children are withdrawn from school or denied access to higher education because of the belief that the higher the girls' educational attainment and qualification the lower the chances of finding a suitable husband.

Ihugh (2017) revealed that, one other social constraint could be seen in the attitude of the parents as a result of the belief surrounding the education of the girl - child. This has gone a long way in restraining fathers and husbands from educating their daughters and wives. It is widely believed that, educated women are difficult to control and are not submissive. Some even think that educated women are arrogant, promiscuous, disobedient, bold, disrespectful and therefore, would not make good house wives

### **Religious Factors**

Religion can be seen as a contributing factor to the inequalities between men and women, (Wegh, 1998). The religious impediments to girl child education constitute an important element that continues to hinder genuine efforts by government and individuals to improve girl child education. Tiv traditional religion which is a unique way of worship

revolves around witchcraft and divinities. When the missionaries established schools in the year 1842 there was discrimination against women enrolment as many saw the education of a girl child as a threat to chastity.

### **Government Efforts to Reduce Impediments to the Girl Child Education**

The Nigerian Government measures to reduce the inequality that exist between men and women in education and these have been enshrined in some of it's policies and laws. Some of these will be discussed as follows:

#### ***Sustainable Development Goals***

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are a universal call to action to end poverty, Goal 5 in particular is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Key areas include female-male relations, education and political participation of women. Africa has made significant progress on the Millennium Development Goals, including enrolling more children in primary school, particularly girls, increasing the representation of women in national parliaments, and reducing child and maternal deaths and the proportion of people infected with HIV. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also crucial to accelerating sustainable development. Empowering women and girls have a multiplier effect and help drive economic growth and development across the board. Since 2000, UNDP, together with UN partners and the rest of the global community, made gender equality central. Women now make up to 41 percent of paid workers outside of agriculture, compared to 35 percent in 1990.

There are still huge inequalities in the labour market in some regions, with women systematically denied equal access to jobs. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work and discrimination in public office, still remains a huge barrier. If these areas are addressed, more parents would see the need to send the girl child to school. Already many parents who had their daughters educated and are now in privileged positions can attest that they are better off with their girl children than the boys.

#### ***The National Gender Policy***

The policy goal of the National Gender Policy (NGP, 2008) is to build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstances, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well-being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth.

The policy advocates non-discrimination as enshrined in section 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It emphasizes on the desired result of giving male and female equal opportunities to advance socially, physically, educationally, politically and economically. The Nigerian constitution civil and political rights (chapter 4 of the 1999 constitution) are actionable in a court of law, while economic, social and cultural rights (chapter 2 of 1999 constitution) are not. Section 43 permits both male and female to own and acquire moveable property. In spite of all this, a large proportion of women in Nigeria are banned from owning land by the customary laws of inheritance. Gender equality and equity are measures that

will promote the girl – child into reaching great potentials even as a woman.

### **Counselling Intervention using the Transactional Analysis (TA)**

The transactional Analysis is rooted in a philosophy that is anti - deterministic and asserts that human beings are capable of transcending their conditions through early programming (Corey, 2013). People are capable of understanding their past decisions and that they can choose to re-decide to rise above habits, patterns and to select new goals and behaviour. This does not mean that people are free from the influences of social forces. It acknowledges that people are influenced by the expectation and demands of significant others, especially early decisions that made at a time in life when they were highly dependent on others. These decisions can be reviewed and challenged and if early decisions are no longer appropriate new decisions can be made.

In parental attitude towards child upbringing, a parent influences a child's psyche for example, a girl – child, that she is just good for producing children and doing household chores (parent ego and adult ego state) a life script which is a typical way parents perceive the girl – child in the traditional family context. The girl - child therefore needs strokes to be able to develop a true sense of trust in the world and a basis for loving self. In which case, strokes can either be positive or negative. Positive strokes express warmth, affection or appreciation either verbally or non- verbally ( look, smile, encouragement, gesture). Whatever injunctions people have received and whatever the resulting life decisions, children can fight against the negative strokes by re-deciding such to the right course.

In every transaction, basic communication includes the exchange of strokes. A game is an ongoing series of transactions which ends with one person feeling sad. By engaging in strokes they receive strokes which help them to re-decide and take new life positions. Through script analysis, members become aware of how they got their life position and this goes a long way to help them re-decide.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper attempted to examine some insights on the socio-cultural impediment to girl-child education among the Tiv people of Benue State. These socio-cultural impediments were identified as poverty, parental attitude and religion as strong indicators for the effects of girl child education. It concludes that counselling remains an anti-dot for changing the perceptions of parents and the society at large towards girl child education. There is need for families to realize that the girl child is an asset and not a liability and a human resource that should be trained and utilized for the development of any nation. Based on the discussions, the following recommendations are made:

1. Community sensitization should be embarked upon by the State, LGAs, and NGOs with the support of traditional and religious leaders to address the socio-cultural impediments that limit the empowerment of the girl-child.
2. Parents should give equal opportunities to children irrespective of their gender especially as it concerns their education and potentials.

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