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**Girl-Child Education and Entrepreneurship in  
Nigeria**

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**Abstract.** In Nigeria, girl-child education has been facing a number of challenges such as early marriage and economic hardship. That fewer women apply for entry to universities is a result of their being fewer girls completing secondary education and this problem has its roots in primary school. In the context of an evolving market-oriented, competitive and private-sector driven economy, corporate capitalism and globalization, education is expected to produce women that are versatile enough to acquire competitive positions as well as generate their own employment. However, the schools are often characterized by outmoded operational processes and management structures which are largely incapable of producing female entrepreneurs with the capacity to generate ideas and to turn such ideas to profitable and emotionally satisfying ventures through perseverance and hard work. Education for women and girls therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of women in the true sense of raising their status.

**Keywords.** Education, Entrepreneur, Competitiveness, Paradigm shift, Girl-child, Gender.

**JEL.** D71, D74, D79.

## 1. Introduction

The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is very explicit about its intentions for educational delivery in Nigeria. Chapter II, Fundamental Objectives and Directive principles of State Policy, Section 18 (1) provides for government to direct its policy towards ensuring that “there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels). Expectedly, and in response to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Federal Government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999. The programme was intended to be tuition free, compulsory schooling from primary to junior secondary school level. The Nigerian child, irrespective of gender, is expected to undergo nine years of basic education.

However, data available seem to indicate that this effort may not be successful if girl-child education in Nigeria is not promoted. As at 2005, UNICEF reported that 40% of Nigerian children aged 6-11 did not attend any primary school, with the northern part of the country recording the lowest school attendance rate particularly for girls. It was estimated that about 4.7 million children of primary school age were not in school. They posited that 30% of pupils dropped out of primary school and only 54% transited to junior secondary schools (Yahaya, 2014). Reasons provided for this low completion rates were child labour, economic hardship and early marriage for girls.

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A Report by UNICEF (2012) as captured by OSSAP-MDGs in its Interview Questions and Answers report 2014 on out of school children indicated that Nigeria has 10.5 million out-of school children. This was the highest in the world, of which the Almajiri children were over 9 million. Also with the high rate of insecurity in the North especially in the North-East geo-political zone, schools have been targeted and destroyed, the drop-out levels of children in those areas continue to increase. No wonder, a newspaper reported the lamentations of a Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as to the need for a concerted effort at addressing the needs of girl-child education in Northern Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2010). What is responsible for this state of affairs? This study, therefore, attempted to assess the girl-child education in Nigeria from the angles of access and beyond access with particular reference to entrepreneurship.

## 2. Research Method

The data were obtained from the following sources; Universal Basic Education (UBE) Office, Abuja, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, bulletins of National Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), UNDP’s Human Development Report (2002), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and National Assembly Statistical Information (2009). These data were analysed using tables and simple percentages.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Issues of Access and Beyond Access

Here, an attempt was made to examine issues from two angles: access issues and beyond access issues. Access, in this context, would refer to: Getting enrolled in school- fewer girls than boys actually enroll, except in eight of the thirty-six states of the federation (see table 1); Regular attendance in school- a larger proportion of girls are likely to absent themselves from school, especially in rural areas; Steady progress through all stages of schooling- girls are at a greater risk of repeating grades; Completion of the prescribed number of years of schooling- girls also run a greater risk of not completing primary schooling, i.e. dropping out before the sixth year; Successful learning achievement- in the present circumstances, girls (especially in rural areas and girls from poor socio-economic backgrounds) tend not to achieve any meaningful learning, even when they have managed to stay on in school (Obanya, 2004:73).

**Table 1.** *Issues of Access and Beyond Access*

State	% Girls	State	% Girls	State	% Girls
Abia	50.7	Enugu	50.3	Ogun	48.9
Adamawa	41.8	Gombe	41.7	Ondo	49.7
AkwaiBom	50.8	Imo	50.1	Osun	50.4
Anambra	52.0	Jigawa	35.9	Oyo	51.1
Bauchi	39.6	Kaduna	42.5	Plateau	46.0
Bayelsa	48.3	Kano	40.3	Rivers	50.7
Benue	44.4	Katsina	32.6	Sokoto	20.0
Borno	39.8	Kebbi	33.2	Taraba	29.4
Cross River	49.7	Kogi	48.5	Yobe	36.0
Delta	48.9	Kwara	45.4	Zamfara	26.7
Ebonyi	49.2	Lagos	50.2	Fct	44.6
Edo	48.8	Nasarawa	38.2		
Ekiti	52.8	Niger	33.2	National Average	42.9

**Source:** UBE Office, Abuja.

The term “beyond access” is a way of saying that the poor score of girls on access issues is not biologically determined. The following environmental factors

contribute to it: Households and families: high incidence of poverty, societal preference for the male-child, over burdening of the girl-child with household chores and labour, concern for the security of the girl-child in the case of long distances between home and school; Cultural beliefs and practices: early marriages are a good example; The school and its environment: often not gender-friendly (that is, not conducive to the needs of the girls), poor gender awareness on the part of teachers; The curriculum, didactic materials and teaching: learning activities-often reflecting the high level of gender insensitivity in the wider society; The low status of women in the wider society: the environment not providing appropriate role models of the successful, educated woman.

**3.2. Secondary Education**

The gender gap between male and female that has its roots in primary schools becomes even more manifest at the secondary school level. This can be explained as follows: A smaller proportion of girls are able to transit from primary to secondary schooling; Female drop-outs become much more as a result of such adolescent girl's environmental hazards as early marriages, unwanted pregnancies, gender insensitive educational environments, curricular and teaching methods as well as lack of encouragement from the wider society come more strongly to the fore; Curricular exclusion practices which tend to draw girls away from mathematics, science and technology become more intense (Obanya, 2004:74).

Table II reveals that there were 2,214,964 pupils in junior secondary schools in Nigeria in 1997, and that some 47% of these were girls. The table also shows that thirteen states: Abia, AkwaIbom, Anambra, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo and Rivers had achieved gender parity in Junior Secondary school enrolment. Thirteen other states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Nassarawa, Niger, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara, were still far from attaining gender parity.

**Table 2. Junior Secondary Enrolment: 1997**

<b>State</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Abia	39,028	50,617	89,645
Adamawa	45,645	10,498	56,143
AkwaIbom	39,311	45,853	85,164
Anambra	27,804	54,447	82,251
Bauchi	22,298	13,402	35,700
Bayelsa	8,468	7,138	15,606
Benue	49,868	33,458	83,326
Borno	26,923	16,100	43,023
Cross River	18,093	21,655	39,748
Delta	34,927	42,545	77,472
Ebonyi	14,860	13,114	27,974
Edo	31,215	33,311	64,526
Ekiti	14,156	13,238	27,394
Enugu	32,282	40,452	72,734
Gombe	19,956	9,644	29,600
Imo	24,622	33,755	76,336
Jigawa	11,376	3,810	15,186
Kaduna	42,581	33,755	76,336
Kano	39,105	27,797	66,902
Katsina	24,759	15,115	39,874
Kebbi	13,697	3,691	17,388
Kogi	33,948	26,714	60,662
Kwara	31,973	27,690	59,663
Lagos	108,625	116,617	225,242
Nasarawa	24,473	12,027	36,500

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Niger	23,782	16,867	40,649
Ogun	68,113	63,042	131,155
Ondo	20,109	22,795	42,904
Osun (1996)	56,858	51,368	108,226
Oyo	79,301	81,399	160,700
Plateau	40,324	33,256	73,580
Rivers	31,867	31,931	63,798
Sokoto	15,167	5,950	21,117
Taraba	16,216	7,429	23,645
Yobe	50,721	6,520	57,241
Zamfara	10,873	1,871	12,744
F.C.T	12,117	10,613	22,730
<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>1,205,441 (53.7%)</b>	<b>1,039,523 (46.3%)</b>	<b>2,244,964</b>

Source: UBE Office, Abuja

The figures on that Table raise one important issue on gender inequality in education in Nigeria-The states that are far from attaining gender parity at the primary school level are also the ones that are yet to do so at the secondary school level.

The situation at the Senior Secondary school level is demonstrated by the data provided in Table III. The proportion of girls entering for various subjects at the Senior Secondary certificate levels are as follows: English Language (42%), Mathematics (42%), Physics (27.5%), Chemistry (37%), Biology (44%), Agricultural Science (14%), Economics (44%), Government (42%), Geography (30%) and History (42%).

**Table 3. Summary of SSCE Results: Results: 1985-1992**

Subject	Entries- Male (%)	Entries-Female (%)	Credits-Male (%)	Credits- Female (%)
English Language	58	42	5.7	3.6
Mathematics	58	42	7.9	3.5
Physics	73	27	15.6	6.4
Chemistry	63	37	13.3	5.6
Biology	56	44	9.3	5.4
Agricultural Science	63	37	14.1	7.4
Economics	56	44	16.6	9.4
Government	58	42	23.1	12.2
Geography	71	29	22.5	6.2
History	58	42	21.7	14.5

Source: NERDC- Adapted from Obanya (2004).

These figures help to illustrate the 'beyond access' dimension of gender inequality at the Senior Secondary level, a point further emphasized by the examination success rates attained by girls.

### 3.3. Tertiary Education

JAMB aptly illustrates that the gender gap that begins in the primary school becomes a gender gulf at the tertiary level, in 2002 statistical reports: For the year (2000/2001 academic year), 42.5% of applicants for admission into Nigerian universities (198,819 out of 467,490) were women; However, of the 50,227 admitted, only 19,006 (37.8%) were women; Women applications were very low for engineering courses (12%); applications for both sexes were relatively high for courses in Administration (49.6%); A relatively high proportion of women secured admission into the Faculties of Arts (57.7%) and Education (55%); For the other faculties, the percentages of women applicants securing admissions were: agriculture (42%), engineering (16%), law (39%), medical sciences (39%), the pure sciences (39%) and the social sciences (35%).

That fewer women apply for entry to universities is a consequence of fewer girls completing secondary education. Furthermore, that a smaller proportion of women applicants (as compared with male applicants) succeed in gaining admission is a reflection of girls' relatively lower success rate in the Senior Secondary certificate examinations.

#### **4. Gender and Entrepreneurship**

An estimated 50% of the population of Nigeria is made up of women and girls. UNDP's Human Development Report (2002) estimates the earned income of women to be \$532, while the comparable figure for men is \$1,254. This indicates that on the average, a woman's income is barely 42% of a man's income. The same report shows female economic activities as representing only 56% of those of men. Thus, for every woman engaged in economic activities, there are at least two men. While there are well-known political and economic determinants of the prevalence of poverty, the case of women is usually attributed to the following factors: Inappropriateness of education and training, a situation in which knowledge and skills are not at the level that can awaken human potentials; A disabling socio-cultural environment which denies women a good number of basic human rights: rights to property, inhuman treatment of widows, succession and inheritance rights, even the rights to be seen and be heard; Inadequate access to credits, even when women manage to make concerted efforts in spite of all odds; The low social value placed on the girl-child; Lack of social recognition for the socio-economic and human welfare roles that women play in all societies; The generally low status of women in society; The prevalence of women in no-income, low-income, unattractive, low-status and back breaking jobs and occupations.

The paradigm shift from the developmentalist to the entrepreneurial function of education means that the traditional notion of education as the engine-houses of the state enterprise has also changed. Even the notion of keeping women in no-income and low-income occupations is as well changing. In the context of an evolving market-oriented, competitive and private-sector driven economy, corporate capitalism and globalization, education is expected to produce women that are versatile enough to acquire competitive positions as well as generate their own employment (Anyebe, 2014). However, the schools are often characterised by outmoded operational processes and management structures which are largely incapable of producing female entrepreneurs with the capacity to generate ideas and to turn such ideas to profitable and emotionally satisfying ventures through perseverance and hard work.

Poverty is no respecter of gender; it cuts across both male and female and ages. It is on record that the scourge of poverty is more pronounced on the female gender than male in Nigeria. The gender statistics collated by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in 2006 and 2008, reveal that out of 70% of the Nigeria's population living below poverty line, 65% are women. Income and purchasing power was estimated to be US\$1,495 for men as compared to US\$614 for women. Men had greater access to high-paying, secure employment. For example, about 76% of federal civil service employees were men. Women occupied less than 24% of the workforce at the federal level and less than 14% of the overall management positions in the federal civil service. Also, about 17.5% of Nigerian medical doctors are women and 82.5% were men (National Assembly Statistical Information, 2009). These disparities have a significant effect on the capacity of women to contribute to the economic growth of the country and to play active role in politics. Only a very tiny proportion of women do get into the commanding heights of national life for which higher education is a prerequisite.

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Education which is known worldwide as an instrument of development has not been fully accessed by Nigerian women. Even though there are a few female trained scholars and technocrats in the country, there is a wide disparity in educational attainment and literacy rate which varies from 65.7% for male and 47.8% for female. There is low female enrolment in schools. In 2005, the enrolment in the primary schools showed that 56% of pupils in primary schools were male, while female represented 44%. The education statistics on gender published in 2007 by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Development show that on the average 70% of women in Nigeria are not literate (National Assembly Statistical Information, 2009).

The discrimination against female gender in the country is contrary to section 17 (3) of the 1999 Constitution which states that:

Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment. There shall equal pay for equal work without discrimination on account of sex, or no other ground whatsoever.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the paper would like to submit that the poor handling of girl-child education has adversely affected the development of entrepreneurship among women in Nigeria. Education for the girl-child therefore, should aim at reversing the trend of gender discrimination by ensuring full empowerment of girl-child and by extension women in the true sense of raising their status in the following essential dimensions: Psychologically: building and enhancing their self-awareness and self-esteem; Intellectually: awakening and sustaining reasoning and knowledge-acquisition skills; Technically: inculcating in them a variety of socially useable and marketable life-skills; Socially: ensuring that they use their newly acquired knowledge, skills, self-esteem and technical skills to serve society better and to push for social equity and social recognition; Economically: enhancing their productivity in the economic sense, as well as enhancing their income earning capacity; Politically: ensuring that the girl-child and by extension women can be seen and heard, that their civic rights are recognized as essential human rights, that they also become fully involved in decision-making at all levels.

Promoting girl-child education will enhance the production of female entrepreneurs with the capacity to generate ideas and to turn such ideas to profitable and emotionally satisfying ventures through perseverance and hard work.

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