

Guidance and Counselling as Veritable Tool for Girl-Child Transformation in Post Primary Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Girl Child Right, especially to education in Nigeria, is an issue of growing concern which is treated with levity. Scholarly records show that, the girl-child faces a lot of molestation which includes, forced labour, being sold into slavery, and forced into early marriage. This is a trend that can be eradicated through Enhanced Teacher Guidance and Counselling. To buttress this view, we embarked on this study to identify how Guidance and Counselling Approaches can be deployed to educate the girl-child and enable her to stand strong in the face of her plights/challenges. We adopted a descriptive survey research design using Key Informant Interviews and participant observation method of data gathering. Our representative samples were selected by identifying schools in local government headquarters of the study drawn from both the northern and southern parts of the country. Findings revealed that guidance and counselling plays a very prominent role in educating the girl child about her rights. This however, is bedevilled by poor government policies and unavailability of adequate finance. In our submission, we suggested that, there is the need for a deliberate government policy mandating the setting up of effective guidance and counselling units to support the education of the girl-child.

1. Introduction

Education is said to be a vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress [1]. Asiegbu, Okorji and Bosah [2] opine that, education inculcates in the individual, knowledge, skills, character, and desirable values that will foster national development and self-actualization.

In Nigeria the right to equitable education however seem to be a mirage for the girl child. Evidently, cultural and traditional restrictions limits her capacity to function adequately amongst her male counterpart in society. In other words, the limitation foist on her by culture and tradition places restrictions

on the girl-child and denies her access to a lot of things including free access to education thereby impinging on the very critical right of the girl child in Nigeria.

The Girl Child Right, especially to education is an issue of growing concern which, in our view, is treated with levity even though it is topical, current and has been discussed extensively in several fora including academic conferences and seminars. Issues discussed in these fora often revolve around but not limited to girl-child vulnerability and gaps of policy directed at mitigating her exposure to ills in society. Nmadu [3]. observes that, the Nigerian society (pre-modern and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potently inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices. What this means then is that, the plight of the girl stems from tradition that starts from the family unit.

The family unit instead of making adequate provisions for the safety of the girl-child would rather enslave her even the most with the kind of roles drawn out for her in the home front. For instance, girls are made to travel long distance to fetch large quantity of water meant for use in the house irrespective of the time of the day. In the mornings, she is made to travel long distance to fetch water, sell one form of edible product needed by households or perform delicate home chores while her male brothers goes off to school.

These occurrences completely deny her the right to function adequately as a free member of society. Yet scholars aver that, education, at basic and post primary school, is a fundamental right of every child as it unveils their great potentials. This is essential for the exercise of all other human rights which promotes individual freedom, empowerment and yields important development benefits [4].

Today in Nigeria, the plight of the girl-child has taken a front burner and occupies topics of intellectual discourse, debates, and brainstorming sessions all aimed at identifying workable solutions to ease their sufferings. Issues often discussed revolve around, but are not limited to, girl-child vulnerability and gaps of policy directed at mitigating their exposure to ills in society. Despite all efforts made at deliberating on the

matter of girl child molestation, trafficking in prostitution, forced labour persist. Rather than abate, there has been a growing and frightening silence on the part of government to the plight of the girl child.

Evidently, the girl child is neglected both by government legislations and social concerns. There are next to nothing of group support systems to cater to the fallout of the neglect the girl child suffers in the society. The girl-child is frequently taken advantage of in terms of care for her wellbeing starting from the family unit. It has become obvious that, further steps, both vocal and advocated, have to be taken into consideration as one of the sure approaches to migrating the gap created by inherent cultural practices.

This researchers are of the opinion that one of such approach or attempts to reduce or mitigate the plight of the girl child is through enhanced teacher guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling is a learning oriented process carried out in a social environment in which the professionally competent counsellor attempts to assist the counsellee, using appropriate procedures, to make them more self reliant become a happy and productive member of the society.

Guardian Counsellors achieve their objective of guidance by formulating realistic and purposeful goals for total personal growth [5]. Jones [6] in the attempt to expatiate the says, guidance is a personal help given by someone; it is designed to assist a person to decide where they want to go, what they want to do or how they can best accomplish their purpose; it assists them to solve problems that arise in life. This study agrees with the postulations of these scholars and subscribes to the relevance of enhanced teacher guidance and counselling in post primary institution. However, the extent to which this is true can be deduced through the findings of this study.

2. Literature Review

The relegation of the girl child to second class status dates back several centuries past and emanates from the casual attention given to women from time immemorial. That is to say that, the exclusions of women from active participation in society have their roots in the traditional roles and customs of society which has carved out very stringent roles for them such that negates her right to free choices to make decisions that will improve their status in society.

Supporting this view, Allanana [7]. contends that, the culture of patriarchy is a very strong determinant of male dominance over female and as a result men will sit back in the family to keep the family name and lineage growing while women will be married out. Thus men are being trained for leadership activities while women are confined to domestic activities; roles ascribed to them by culture which affect them later in life, thereby making them to lose self

confidence/worth and have low self-esteem in their career and in adult life; politics inclusive.

Early history shows that the human society has been a male dominated one [8]. For instance, in the Arabian culture, the birth of a daughter is regarded as a thing of shame and disgrace. Thus, these offspring are treated with disdain and contempt in line with the shame and disgrace they are purported to have brought to the family, while the birth of a son is welcomed with jubilation and celebration. The male children, when born are often cradled, clothed in robes, adorned in jades, and presented with scepters as toys.

Similarly, in Nigeria, the approach to the birth of female children is not very different from the plight of the girl-child in the Arabian customs and in fact several other developing societies. Like its Arabian counterpart, the birth of a male child in Nigeria excites members of the family more than a female child. In the view of Uwameiye and Iserameiya [9], as the girl passes through the stages of development, she is bewildered with the peculiar violence of that stage, and as the girl child grows older, the discrimination against her increases, not to talk about other forms of abuse suffered by the girl child within the environment she finds herself starting from her immediate family unit.

The family unit instead of making adequate provisions for the safety of the girl child would rather expose her the most with the kind of roles drawn out for her in the home front. For instance, girls are made to travel distance to fetch large quantity of water meant for use in the house irrespective of the time of the day, while her male brothers go off to school. The belief is that, girls when grown up will eventually get married and go to someone else's home while, the male child will have to carry on the name of the family. As such, supporting the girl's education will only add value to her future husband.

This belief still exists in some areas especially in the Northern area of the country where it is very common to give out girls for marriage at very tender age. In the view of UNESCO [10], this gender apartheid places the girl child in a disadvantaged position, where her potentials are suppressed and self-actualization is not achieved. She therefore becomes a victim of a pre-existing socio-cultural male chauvinism. Furthermore, on the account of gender, girl children are subjected to all multiple forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

2.1. Guidance and Counselling as Transformational Tools in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Guidance and Counselling is a professional strategy often adopted by teachers to engage students facing challenges in secondary schools aimed at resolving what ever those challenges are. Anyamene, Mwokolo,

Anyachebelu [11] construe counseling as a form of education, which the challenged students receive from their counselors. Similarly Palmer [] sees counseling as an educational process used in solving problems of the learner. United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, [10] in support of the above assertion, states that counseling is actively listening to an individual's story and communicating understanding, respect and empathy: clarifying goals and assisting challenged students with the decision making process.

Onyilofor [12] emphasizes that counseling is a process by which a professional counselor helps the client to understand himself or herself better. Onyilofor [13] further advocates that counseling is the assistance a professional counselor gives to challenged students (clients) on issues of education, social-personal, and career choice. Stratton [14] sees the role of professional counselor to be most importantly one to one interviews between the career counselor and client.

In addition, Obi, Oye, Mohd, and Beknice [15] in support of the above said that career counseling may involve both face to face help or may be mediated through telephone, letter, text or even the internet. Mghweno, Mghweno and Baguna [16] noted that guidance and counseling service is not a new phenomenon. In Nigeria, for instance, the counselling service was incorporated into the school systems in 1959. Consequently, incorporating guidance and counseling into the school system was to eliminate overwhelming ignorance of many challenged students on their choice of career prospects and personality maladjustment among them.

Furthermore, other roles of professional counselor include opportunities to develop knowledge in the challenged student and appreciations of themselves and others; opportunities to develop relationship skills, ethical standard and a sense of responsibility in the challenged students; opportunities to acquire skills and attitudes necessary to develop educational goals which suit the challenged students' needs, interests and abilities. Onyilofor [17] posits that the professional counselor should utilize his/her professional skills (administrative skills, thinking skills, orientation and planning skills, time management skills, technical and technological skills) for the transformation and education of challenged student in Nigerian higher education.

Onyilofor [18], further states that a counselor should be a think tank and an inventive problem solver and should be able to reason properly both with the brain and the heart in the transformation of challenged students in Nigeria's higher education. The scholar further enthuse that counseling enables the challenged student to adjust himself to his studies by improving his study attitude and removing subject matter difficulties. This can be achieved with the assistance of professional counselors. In Nigeria, counseling

generally are viewed in three categories namely; Inclusive counseling, vocational counseling and socio-personal counseling. Parson in Patton & McMahon [19], [20] categorized the role of professional counseling into three dimensions - self-analysis, occupational analysis and true reasoning. Other roles of the PC are consultation to challenged students, individuals, groups, families, couples and organizations, and research into more effective and therapeutic treatment modalities.

3. Statement of the Study Problem

That the girl-child in Nigeria is exposed to all sorts of molestation ranging from slavery to forced labour is no longer news. In recent times however, a very dangerous dimension has been added to this menace, which is; abduction into early marriage at very young age of between 12 and 13 years. This trend is ubiquitous and has become the order of the day. As if that was not enough, victims are compelled to denounce their religion and identity and adopt a new ones.

The recent occurrence where 13-year-old Ese Oruru was lured into eloping with an eighteen (18) year old lad to the Northern part of the country where she was forced into marriage and forced to embrace the religion of Islam is just one case too many. Ese epitomizes other girls who are being held against their parents wish in places like, Kaduna, Bauchi and Zamfara states [20] to mention just a few. Apart from Ese, other similar issues abound in their numbers in Nigeria and disengages as well as disorientate the girl child and stirs her far from her goals in life.

For instance, in the month of May 2014, a 16-year-old girl named, Ifeoma Nicodemus from the Eastern part of the country was equally lured into eloping with a young man simply called Abdullahi in Zaria, Kaduna State and has been renamed Aisha. Similarly, Blessing Gopep, a 13-year-old was abducted in August 2015 by two men named Iliya and Umaru in Bauchi she is now called Mariam. Linda Christopher was equally abducted in Bauchi by an assailant named Shagari in November 2015; she is now known as Aisha. Progress Jacob, a 13-year-old girl, was abducted in January of 2015 by someone called Musa in Bauchi; she has now been renamed Aishat. Lucy Ejeh was abducted in 2009 at the age of 15 by one man called Awaisu; she has been renamed Lewusa. This could go on and on; the list is endless.

The question that may come to mind at this juncture is, what is the government of Nigeria doing about these cases? Another question begging for answer is, what are Civil Society Groups or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) doing about these incidences? The answer is, nothing significant. While the government seems to have turned a blind eye to this serious human tragedy, there is a dearth of NGOs and International Non-Governmental

Organisations that focus on these very mind boggling occurrences that threatens to undermine the freedom of the girl-child in parts of the Nigerian society.

This study is an effort towards identifying the best approach that can evolved in seeking lasting solutions to the problem. We concluded that, rather than grouse over what ought to be done, by whom it should be done, individuals, organisations and concerned non-governmental organisations should rise to the occasion by looking critically at this situation and setting up strong advocacy fronts and concerted campaigns that will make government see reasons to rise to the challenge that the abuse of the girl-child rights portend for society.

3.1 Significance of the Study

That education is an important tool for transformation is no longer contestable. Scholars globally view education as a vehicle for upliftment and transformation. The tranformanational capacity of education stems from its ability to inculcate values, increase individuals creative abilty, galnanise individuals to act and improve their understanding. It is thus a disservice when certain individuals are nor opportuned or are excluded from these opportunities that been educated provides.

However with adequate guidance, those vulnerable groups relegated by society; in this case the girl child may become aware of the need to make frantic and deliberate moves to get education. Onyilofor [21] aver that, without informed guidance and counseling many challenged students lose focus and direction. Some of the challenged students despite their handicapped condition engage in illegal activities/immoral acts such as truancy, alcoholism, drug abuse, stealing, examination malpractice, plagiarism, sexual immorality, cultism, indecent dressing, prostitution, and drop out, as a result, they lack both focus and direction resulting to total failure in life.

In other words, students that face one form of challenge or the other are of necessity required to yield to the opportunities provided by the G & C units in the secondary schools. The guidance and counseling units assist students in their career choices, help individuals develop their potentialities for self-actualization. As well as conducts with their fellow students.

4. Methodology

The research method adopted for this study was Key Informant Interview (KII). This method was used to elicit information from the school children as well as Guidance and Counselling (G and C) Teachers of the selected secondary schools within Abuja - the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Keffi and some schools in other states in the Southern part of Nigeria.

A purposive sampling was used to determine the locations where we visited. These areas were chosen as follows; in the Northern part of the country we sampled opinion of Guidance Counsellors in two schools selected in the Federal Capital Territory Development Area (FCDA), Junior Secondary School Orozo and Senior Secondary School Nyanya; both in Nassarawa State. In Keffi, Junior Secondary School Kofa Hausa and Government Day Secondary School. One school, the Army Day Secondary School, in Minna Niger State, two public schools in Kaduna as well as Makurdi; (Government College and Saint Gabriel) Benue State; all in the North.

In the Southern part of the country, we equally sampled two schools in Akwa Ibom State; Community Secondary School Ukotokubo and West Itan Secondary School Uyo.

Apart from these schools, government officials in the Abuja Municipal Education Authority were contacted and interviewed on policy issues and implementation. The aim is to is to identify policy gaps, best practices and critical governance issues and probable challenges emanating from the educational body. The analyses rely more on the qualitative approach to review the information gathered, analyzing the voices of the respondents in this case, Guidance Counselling Teachers (G&C Teachers) of the various schools visited in order to extract an evidence based outcome of trends on the subject.

5. Analysis of Findings and Outcomes

The major findings from this study include but not necessarily limited to the following facts:

- The girl child in Nigeria indeed is vulnerable and highly molested by different groups of people including her family unit and her male counterparts within and outside the school.
- Social/cultural proclivities especially the societal discrimination.
- Gaps in the implementation of Government policies.

The above findings in schools domiciled in the Northern part of the country are almost same as those in the Southern parts of the country though with slight variations due to environmental and cultural differences in the country. Schools from both regions are fraught with multiple recorded cases of sexual assault and molestation of girls both at home, within the society as well as within the school. Often, female students are forced to partake in inappropriate sexual acts with their male guardians who may also be related to them.

There are also evident high rate of school drop out. Among the reasons for this high drop out is unplanned pregnancy, sometimes through rape. In a particular school in the Southern part of the country, there are added element of young girls being inducted

into cult system through older male influence. Even then the study findings show that, it was circumstances of molestation suffered in the home front that lead these girls to readily yield themselves to the recruitment into these cult groups who are involved in all sorts of violent crimes including, armed robbery and kidnapping.

Regardless of whether the girl-child is subjected to these instances of molestation, they are often at risk of enslavement through intense housework and miscellaneous requests. There was a case in the North, where a female student was not allowed to go to school until she had given her female guardian a full body massage and cooked her meal, causing her to arrive at school hours late. This practice was purely for the guardian's enjoyment.

Findings show that, the Guidance and Counselling units of the schools in both regions did not relent in their efforts to sensitize and equally enlighten the girl-child of her vulnerability and how to build defences to wade off the vagaries and ills that attempts to overwhelms her.

Among the approaches adopted by the counsellors, especially in Schools in the Northern part of the country is, a weekly gender assembly; a meeting session where the girls are separated from their male counterpart and taught some basic lessons of personal care, proper conducts, male advances and awareness on dangers that lock around the environment. Our findings show that, usually after such interactive discussions, some the victims of extreme abuse are emboldened to bring to the knowledge of the Guidance Counsellors similar plights recounted in their interactive discussions. Though in the South, teachers/counsellors are still petitioning the schoolboard for space in the curriculum to address the students.

6. Discussion

From the forging, it is evident that there is a complete disregard for the rights of the girl child in Nigerian society. While the laws purportedly exist and claims to protect the girl child, those who impinge on the rights of these vulnerable individuals are not held accountable for their actions. Most of these problems stem from the home as the first agent of socialisation. Rather than situating the role of the girl child as valuable member of the family, tradition/customs just permanently puts her at the base. She is to go through all sorts of ills in society, stretching outward to other agents of socialization to which the school belongs, with the girl child being the victim.

At the home front, the role given to the girl child falls within, cooking for the entire family, going long distance to fetch water and performing other time consuming and strenuous functions, while the male plays around the house. Likewise, at the level of society, the cultural proclivity puts the girl child at the

receiving end. Culture and customs limit her to act in ways that ensures her commitment to the patriarchal dictates of her counterparts.

This brings us to the challenges and existing gaps in policies and challenges limiting the effective implementation of guidance counselling as an effective tool for increasing awareness in secondary schools. In the first instance, guidance counsellors adequately attend to the needs of the children through carefully outlined professional and systematic process. Usually the G & C unit set out different programmes through which activities of the students both in their academic and social behaviour are examined. For schools in the Northern part of the country especially, the G & C set certain days are set aside known as Gender Assembly to counsel students.

In several instances as findings show; students are emboldened to step forward to reveal all sorts of molestations they suffer both at the home front, the level of society and in the schools. In a particular instance, after a Gender Assembly session, a student was encouraged to approach her G & C to explain how she is been abused sexually by her father's brother who is supposed to be parenting her.

Likewise, a student recounted in another instance after a Gender Assembly session why she usually comes late to school., the student's account reveal that, everyday she had to wait up for her aunt to wake from sleep in the mornings no matter how late, boil hot water and massage aunts body and prepare her meal and for the aunt to drop her off in school before going off to work. Several other situations of this nature and worst magnitude exist and usually handled by the G & C officers.

Findings show that, the guidance counsellors are however constrained in several ways. Among this is, the absence of deliberate policy direction that moderates the ways the duties of the counsellors ought to be carried out. Also, lack of training as well as opportunities to attend skill building seminars deprive these professionals of knowledge on the current trends and approaches to deal with complex situations.

7. Conclusion

Guidance counselling is very important and is instrumental in guiding and protecting the girl child from falling into the trap that denigrates her rights in society. This underscores the significance of this study in that, it provides adequate information both to researchers for further studies as well to non-governmental organizations and the government to help it appreciate the depth of the plight of the girl. Especially those who may want to key into programme supports for this group of people.

We confidently say that through enhanced teacher guidance and counselling approaches, the girl child can become adequately enlightened about the inherent danger around her and be educated on the very best

way to guide herself from the danger lurking at the backyard of her life. The relevance of guidance and counselling can never be over-emphasized. As findings have shown, that at the family unit, the girl child is not safe; likewise, at the tiers of government.

The most promising ally is the guidance and counselling support directed at empowering her through adequate knowledge. Hardly has this angle been advocated. We strongly postulate that; enhanced guidance counselling is sine qua non to improved living and can improve the way the girl child interacts in Nigerian society. Thus, adequate support should be given to the guidance and counselling units of schools to help improve the conditions of the girl child so that she is able to pursue an education free of these troubling barriers in Nigeria.

This study was carried out in public schools and can not necessarily be generalized to the private sector. In order to fully grasp the struggles faced by the girl child, future studies should aim to include private schools in their research. Diverse experiences due to differences in socioeconomic class and status may present unique results and provide a more cohesive understanding of the research problem. Regardless, the issues faced by these vulnerable individuals in the public sector must be considered when discussing school curriculum and government policy on education.

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