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# 'Dr' Girl-Child Education: A Reality or a Mirage among Females with Hearing Impairment in Nigeria

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*Abstract: Education is a basic human right, vital to personal and societal development and well being and all children deserve a quality education founded on a rights-based approach and rooted in the concept of gender equality (UNICEF, 2006). It is also stated clearly in the National Policy of Education (NPE, 2004) in Nigeria that education is a right and not a privilege for every citizen whether male or female; able or disabled; young or old, etc. The idea of gender equality was also stressed at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Nigerian women have followed suit by trying to make their impact felt in social and political aspects of the country. One of the slogans now is that the place of women is not only in the kitchen and that if you educate a woman you are educating a nation. Based on this background, the present researcher is interested in finding out the place of females with hearing impairment in terms of girl-child education in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Girl-Child Education

## Introduction

**A**CCORDING TO THE United Nations, “women are over half of the world’s population, yet they do two-thirds of the world’s work, earn one-tenth of the world’s income, and own less than one-tenth of the world’s poverty. The following are the starring facts about some of the plights of women worldwide:

- Of the 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70% are women
- Women earn three-fourths of the income that men earn in the non-agricultural sector
- Women occupy only 10% of the parliamentary seats and only 6% of cabinet positions in 55 countries throughout the world
- Of the total burden of work, women carry an average of 53% in the developing countries and 51% in industrial countries
- Of the world’s 900 million non-illiterate persons, 65% are women due to the lack of educational opportunities
- Worldwide, 76 million more boys are enrolled in primary and secondary school than girls (Christian Children’s Fund, 2007)

UNICEF (2003) noted that in the global political arena, the ongoing debate and action of the upliftment of the girl-child continue to stimulate the involvement of designated UN agencies. Notable among the range of initiatives is that of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) which is a concomitant of the Millennium Development Goals. This was established in April 2000. It draws its constitution from 13 UN entities and charges like-

minded national and international actors to work in concert with the program to obtain Universal Primary Education and also, by 2015, to bridge the gender hiatus encountered in primary and secondary education.

In pursuing the goals of the Millennium Development Goals, many nations of the world have put machinery in place to encourage girl-child education. Kofi Annan, U.N.

Secretary General, in 2001 at the World Education Forum, Dakar Senegal stated that,

“No development strategy is better than one that involves women as central players. It has immediate benefits for nutrition, health, savings and reinvestment at the family, community and ultimately, country level. In other words, educating a girl is a sound development policy that works.”

For instance, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that:

States and parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parents’ or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status (art. 2, para. 1), (II)

Girl-child education and school attendance trails behind boys’ in nearly every developing nation. There is no gainsaying that education is the key to the advancement of girls and women. Hashi (2006)



noted that globally World Vision has joined with communities to ensure that neither violence, disability nor other forms of discrimination will prevent women and girls from enjoying their rights. World Vision recommends thus:

1. Remove all restrictions to educating girls and women, including school fees, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of safety and transportation.
2. Increase funding for school buildings, girls toilets, female teachers, teacher training, transportation and parental cash incentives, to ensure accessible and quality primary and secondary education.
3. Pursue public education and awareness programmes that promote opportunities for girls (including disabled girls) in learning and careers and the benefits of education, empowering parents and combating the attitude that girls are not worth educating.

McClain (2002) stated that in the 1970's, the growing international concern with human rights for persons with disabilities was specifically addressed by the General Assembly in the Declaration on Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons by proclaiming 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons. The human rights of persons with disabilities became an important part of the international policy agenda in the 1980's. The African Decade for Persons with Disabilities (2000 – 2009) has been launched. It is a sub-programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD has been adopted as a roadmap for development in Africa. McClain (2002) emphasized the need to ensure that women with disabilities are part of this development. It is also stated in the Final Platform for Action, adopted in Beijing in 1995, that "women with disabilities in every area, as a minority or 'vulnerable' group meriting particular concern and attention. The platform further elaborates that:

"The girl child with disabilities faces additional barriers and needs to be ensured non-discrimination and equal employment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms...."

Though disabled women and girls face similar discrimination and human rights abuses as other women and girls, their social isolation, exclusion and dependency increases the extent of their abuse. Honda and Lei (2006) stated that females with disabilities in the developing world suffer a "triple discrimination", that is, the marginalization of being female, living in poverty and perceived impairment, is sometimes compounded further by discrimination due to race and ethnicity. While women strive for

equality with men, disabled women "struggle to be recognized first as human beings and secondly as females" MacLeod-Gallagher (1992) reported from the findings of his study that there was a higher rate of unemployment among deaf women than deaf men. In another study by Sela and Weisel (1992), a higher rate of unemployment was reported among men (76%) than women (45.5%). This disparity in terms of employment could be linked to that of inequality in educational opportunities for boys and girls. To buttress this, Mbanefo (2004) stated that girls generally suffer from sex engendered denial and discrimination in most aspects of life. UNICEF (1993) had earlier noted that of all the discrimination and denial of opportunities that the girl child suffered, perhaps the most damaging is the denial of the rights and opportunity to education.

In 2000, 189 United Nations Member States pledged to achieve universal primary education and gender equity in education by 2015 and MDG 2 and 3. However, these targets will not be met unless the concerted effort includes children with disabilities, particularly girls. The World Health Organization estimates that a meagre 2% of all the disabled children in the developing world receive an education. UNESCO estimates that the overall rate for persons with disabilities worldwide is 3% and 1% for disabled women and girls.

Scholars and researchers in Nigeria have surveyed Nigerian educational scene and posited that the scheme is part of an imbalanced picture that cries out for redress in many aspects, especially for the females with hearing impairment. For instance, Ogunjuyigbe, Ojofeitimi and Akilo (2006) noted that despite the efforts of the government, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations and international organizations, female education, however still lags behind that of males in many respects. They opined further that female enrolment rates at all levels of formal education remain below those of males; girls have a higher drop out rate; girls are much fewer in the important subject areas of science, mathematics and technology. Education is believed to change an individual's capacity to contribute to his/her society's advancement; hence the female deaf need to be educated properly in order to perform this function. It has been noted that females are prone to sexual abuse, forced into prostitution, experience child labour (housemaid/girl syndrome is common in Nigeria) or early marriage instead of an early and functional education.

It is stated in the National Policy of Education (NPE, 2004) that the guiding principles of Education in Nigeria are the equipping of every citizen with such knowledge, skills, attitudes and values as will enable him to derive maximum benefits from his membership of society, lead a fulfilling life and

contribute his own quota toward the development and welfare of the community. This philosophy of education is far-fetched in respect to people with a disability, especially women with a disability. In Nigeria, disability confers shame on a family, women with disabilities are ridiculed and exploited and are often victims of social ostracism. Available statistics show that 37% of females with a disability were literate, compared with 57% of disabled males. In essence, the education of the girl-child with a disability is still a mirage and not reality in Nigeria. For instance, at the University of Ilorin, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Centre for Supportive Services for the Deaf in 1990 to support the education of persons with hearing impairment. Records from the institution reveal that out of 30 graduates of the Centre, 3 of them are women. Based on this, the researcher investigated the reasons why

girl-child education with particular reference to the females with hearing impairment is still a mirage.

**Method**

The researcher adopted descriptive survey method for this study, this enabled her to collect relevant information from the respondents on the reasons why girl-child education among females with hearing impairment is still a mirage and not yet a reality in Nigeria. The respondents for this study were hearing impaired students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria; the sampling technique that was employed to select respondents from tertiary institutions was purposive sampling technique. A total number of two hundred respondents (200) participated in the study.

**Descriptive Data**

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex**

Sex	Score	Percentage
Male	122	61%
Female	78	39%
Total	200	100%

Table 1 shows that one hundred and twenty-two (122) or 61% of the respondents were males while seventy eight (78) or 39% were females)..

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Religion**

Religion	Score	Percentage
Islamic	80	40%
Christianity	120	60%
Total	200	100%

Table 2 indicates that eighty (80) respondents which represent 40% were Muslims while one hundred and twenty which represents 60% were Christians respectively

**Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Marital Status**

Marital Status	Score	Percentage
Single	155	77.5%
Married	45	22.5%
Total	200	100%

Table 3 indicates that 155 respondents which represent 77.5% were singles while forty-five respondents which represent 22.5% were married.

**Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age	Score	Percentage
18-21	37	18.5%
22-25	83	41.5%
Above 25	80	40%
Total	200	100%

Table 4 shows that thirty-seven (37) respondents within 18-21 age range participated in this study, this represent 18.5% of the total sample. It further reveals that eighty –three (83) respondents within 22-25 age range participated in this study, this represent 41.5% of the total sample. Table 4 also reveals that eighty (80) respondents within 25 years and above participated in the study, this represent 40% of the total sample.

### Instrumentation

The research instrument used for this study was a questionnaire that sought to find out reasons why

education of females with hearing impairment is still a mirage in Nigeria. The psychometric properties of the instrument were established. The validity of the research instrument was adjudged by experts in related fields, the reliability type that was adopted was the test-retest using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient formula and it yielded 0.72. The questionnaire was divided into two major sections: the demographic section and items section. Section was further divided into four sections viz: personal, parental, financial/economic and societal factors.

### Results

**Table 5: Table Showing Factors Affecting the Education of Females with Hearing Impairment**

Factors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Parental Factor	161	80.5	1st
Personal Factor	157	78.5	2nd
Financial/Economic Factor	130	65.0	3rd
Societal Factor	81	40.5	4th

Table 5 shows the distribution of respondents according to their perception of factors affecting the education of females with hearing impairment. The major factor why education of females with hearing impairment in Nigeria is still a mirage could be traced to parental factor because 80.5% of the respondents attested to this in their responses. For example, 75% of the respondents agreed to the item that stated that “educating a female child is a wasted investment, while that of a male child is a worthwhile asset”. Another major reason was attributed to personal factor, 78.5% of the respondents agreed to items in this section. For instance, 73% agreed to the item that stated that “females with hearing impairment are academically lazy”. Another factor could be attributed to financial/economic reason, 65% of the respondents agreed to items under this section while 40% related it to societal factor.

### Discussion

The attitude of parents to the education of the girl-child is not always favourable in many African countries. For instance, in Nigeria, male preference is still an issue even among the educated elites, there

is that general notion that female children will eventually marry but the male child will preserve the name of the family. This finding is in line with that of Osiki (2007) who found out that 83.3% of parents in his study were of the opinion that they would rather train their boys instead of girls. In the same vein, Ogunjuyigbe, Ojofeitimi and Akilo (2006) concluded from the findings of their study that some parents expressed the opinion that girls were likely to become pregnant or get married before the completion of their schooling and were therefore not worth such an expensive investment. This attitude has translated to unequal access to education, health and employment of women but through the effort of government and some non-governmental agencies the issue of women empowerment is gaining ground.

Another reason while the education of females with hearing impairment is still a mirage could be attributed to factors traceable to these individuals themselves. They do not demonstrate a deep commitment to learning, they feel that the best thing to do is to beg for alms and eventually marry to raise children. It is not surprising therefore that majority of persons with disability that go around begging for money on the streets, social gatherings and religious

places are women. In some parts of Nigeria, some males with hearing impairments even form groups and send girls/women out to beg for money. The reason for this is that people are easily moved with sympathy when they see females with disability (especially when they back children in the hot sun).

Females with hearing impairment also encounter financial difficulties because they are left to fend for themselves at tender age. Majority drop out of school and in order to make ends meet, they serve as domestic maids or take to the streets to beg or even go into prostitution. Members of the society too feel that it is a waste of resources investing in the education of persons with disability especially the female ones.

### Recommendations

Education remains a key factor in social mobilization, evolution and progress of any given society. It is also believed that education changes an individu-

al's capacity to contribute to his/her society's advancement; hence females with hearing impairment need to be educated properly to enable them perform this function. In order to combat this problem, strong advocacy must be put in place to change the attitudes of parents and hearing impaired females to schooling. Nigerian Government should look into the recommendations of the World Vision in respect to this issue by making schooling for female hearing impaired more lucrative than begging. There is the need to provide incentives such as automatic scholarship for the girl-child in this category, this will go a long way to encourage them and parents will be most willing to release their daughters for quality education. Non Governmental Agencies in Nigeria should not limit their activities on women empowerment to the non-disabled but must make sure girls with disabilities are also catered for because what is good for the goose is also good for the gander.

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### About the Author

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I earned my bachelor and master's degrees in Special Education and my doctorate degree in Guidance and Counselling. My professional goal is to pursue professional opportunity which promotes the right and dignity of disabled people. My special knowledge and skills include but not limited to: international teaching, research and services in diverse areas of disabilities, multicultural skills of career counselling and rehabilitation of physically challenged students, counselling services for parents of students with special needs. I am also the academic advisor and the coordinator for graduate students in the department of Guidance and Counselling, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. I teach courses such as: Adolescent Psychology and Counselling; Learning Disabilities and Learning Problems; Group Dynamics and Group Procedures; The Special Child in a Regular Classroom Setting;

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