PROTECTING THE MALE CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A PARADIGM SHIFT

By

[1] Prof. Francis Akubuilo & [2] Arinze Prince Nnadi

[1] Peaceland College, Ebugu

[2] Abia State University, Uturu

Abstract

This study explores the growing educational challenges faced by male children in Nigeria, highlighting a critical but often neglected dimension of gender inequality in education. While significant progress has been made in improving access to education for girls through various global and national initiatives, these efforts have unintentionally created an imbalance, leaving boys increasingly marginalized. The research identifies key contributing factors to this trend, including socioeconomic hardships, cultural norms, rigid gender roles, and the limited relevance of the curriculum to boys' aspirations and interests. Employing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Freire's Critical Pedagogy as theoretical frameworks, the paper provides an in-depth analysis of how these factors interact within broader societal systems to affect male-child education. The study emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive policies and practical interventions, such as democratizing educational access, incorporating vocational training, enhancing curriculum relevance, and fostering community involvement. By proposing a paradigm shift toward balanced educational policies and strategies, the research aims to protect male-child education, ensuring that both boys and girls have equal opportunities to contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Male-child education, Nigeria, gender disparity, educational imbalance, inclusive policies, vocational training, ecological systems theory, critical pedagogy.

Introduction

Education is a vital foundation for individual growth and national development, shaping the future of societies by empowering their young populations. In Nigeria, significant progress has been made in promoting the education of the girl child, driven by a global and national push towards gender equality. Initiatives aimed at bridging the educational gender gap have been successful in many

respects, drawing attention to the historical disadvantages faced by girls. However, this focused attention has inadvertently resulted in the marginalization of boys' education, creating a new set of challenges that threaten the socio-economic fabric of the country.

Boys in Nigeria face a myriad of obstacles that impede their educational attainment, including economic pressures, cultural expectations, and rising insecurity. These challenges have led to increased dropout rates among boys, subsequently contributing to higher rates of unemployment, crime, and social instability. The need for a paradigm shift that equally prioritizes the educational needs of the male child is evident. By rebalancing educational policies and resources to support boys, Nigeria can ensure a more inclusive and sustainable development path. This paper seeks to explore the necessity of a balanced approach to education that equally prioritizes the male child, proposing a paradigm shift to protect and enhance male education in Nigeria.

The Concept of Education

Education is a multifaceted process encompassing formal instruction, informal learning, and vocational training. It aims to develop individuals intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally, preparing them for personal success and societal contribution. Education promotes critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and ethical values, making it a vital component of societal progress.

Intellectual Development: Education equips individuals with cognitive skills and knowledge, enabling them to understand and engage with the world around them.

Social Development: Through education, individuals learn social norms, values, and behaviors necessary for interacting with others and contributing to community life.

Emotional Development: Education helps individuals develop emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-regulation.

Moral Development: Education instills ethical values and principles, guiding individuals to make responsible and moral decisions.

Democracy in Education

Democracy in education is a principle that promotes equal access, participation, and opportunities for all students, irrespective of gender, race, or socio-economic background. It envisions an inclusive educational system where all children, whether boys or girls, have the freedom to learn, express themselves, and achieve their potential. This approach not only addresses historical inequalities but also empowers both the boy-child and the girl-child to thrive academically and socially (Gutmann, 1999).

Core Tenets of Democracy in Education

Democracy in education is grounded in several key principles:

Equality of Access: Ensuring all children have the same opportunities to attend school and receive quality education (Dewey, 1916).

Participation: Allowing students a voice in their educational journey, including choices in learning paths and extracurricular activities (Fielding, 2001).

Equity: Providing tailored support to meet the diverse needs of students, acknowledging that different children may require different resources to succeed (Levin, 2003).

Inclusivity: Creating a learning environment that respects and celebrates diversity, where every student feels valued and included (Banks, 2015).

Supporting the Boy-Child

1. Addressing Gender Stereotypes: Boys often face stereotypes that discourage them from engaging in activities perceived as 'feminine' or expressing vulnerability. Democracy in education encourages breaking down these stereotypes, allowing boys to pursue interests in arts, literature, or any field without societal pressures (Connell, 2005). Educational curricula that include diverse role models and challenge traditional gender roles can help boys explore a broader range of interests and skills (Skelton, 2001).

2. Emotional and Social Development: Boys experience societal pressure to conform to ideals of toughness, which can hinder their emotional development. Democratic education promotes social and emotional learning (SEL), which teaches empathy, communication, and emotional regulation (Elias et al., 1997). Integrating SEL into the curriculum encourages boys to express their emotions and build healthy relationships, contributing to their overall well-being and academic success (Zins et al., 2004).

3. Tailored Learning Approaches: Recognizing that boys and girls might have different learning styles, democracy in education advocates for diverse teaching methods. Boys, who may benefit from more active and hands-on learning experiences, can thrive when provided with interactive and engaging educational activities (Gurian & Stevens, 2005). Personalized learning plans that consider individual strengths and interests help boys remain motivated and achieve their potential (Tomlinson, 2001).

Historical Context of Boy-Child Education in Nigeria

Historically, Nigerian society prioritized the education of boys over girls due to cultural norms and economic considerations. Boys were seen as future breadwinners and leaders, leading to greater investments in their education. This led to significant gender disparities in education access and outcomes. However, advocacy for girl-child education over the past decades has shifted the focus, leading to substantial improvements in girls' educational opportunities.

Efforts to promote girl-child education, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, have significantly closed the gender gap in education. These initiatives were

necessary to address the historical marginalization of girls and ensure gender equality in education (Direct Research Publisher).

Current Challenges Facing Boy-Child Education

Despite historical preferences, boys in Nigeria now face several challenges that hinder their educational progress:

Economic Pressures: Many boys are compelled to drop out of school to support their families economically. This trend is prevalent in both rural and urban areas where boys are often engaged in child labor to supplement family income (Offorma, 2019).

Cultural Expectations: Societal norms still place significant pressure on boys to fulfill roles as providers, which can lead to early school dropout rates and engagement in low-skilled jobs (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020).

Curriculum Relevance: The current educational curriculum often fails to engage boys adequately. A lack of practical and vocational training options can result in disinterest and higher dropout rates (Boma et al., 2022).

Gender Stereotypes: Stereotypes associating academic success with femininity can discourage boys from pursuing academic excellence. Boys may face ridicule from peers for being studious, which can negatively impact their educational aspirations (World Bank, 2022).

Benefits of Education for the Boy-Child

Economic Empowerment: Education provides boys with the skills and qualifications necessary for securing stable employment, thereby reducing poverty and promoting economic stability. Educated boys are more likely to obtain well-paying jobs and contribute to economic growth (Offorma, 2019).

Social Stability: An educated male population is essential for social cohesion and stability. Education fosters a sense of responsibility, civic awareness, and community participation. Boys who remain in school are less likely to engage in criminal activities, leading to safer communities (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020; World Bank, 2022).

Personal Development: Education promotes critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and ethical values. It helps boys develop a sense of identity and self-worth, enabling them to make informed decisions and lead fulfilling lives (Global Campaign for Education, 2021).

Health and Well-being: Educated boys are more likely to make healthier lifestyle choices, understand the importance of hygiene and nutrition, and access healthcare services. This leads to better health outcomes and a reduction in disease prevalence (UNICEF Nigeria, 2020).

Gender Equality: Educating boys about gender equality and respect for women can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and

promote a more inclusive society. Boys who understand and advocate for gender equality are more likely to support the education and empowerment of their female peers (Offorma, 2019).

The Current Educational Landscape

Over the past few decades, global and national efforts have focused on bridging the gender gap in education. Programs such as the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and Nigeria's Universal Basic Education (UBE) have made significant progress in enrolling more girls in schools and reducing gender disparities. However, these efforts, while crucial, have often overshadowed the challenges facing boys in the educational system.

Research has shown that boys in Nigeria are falling behind their female counterparts in education. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in 2019, the gender parity index (GPI) for gross enrollment in secondary education in Nigeria was 0.83, indicating a significant disparity in favor of girls (UNICEF, 2020). This trend is alarming, as education is a critical determinant of future opportunities and societal contribution.

In many regions of Nigeria, particularly in the North, socio-economic factors, cultural practices, and security issues have contributed to boys dropping out of school at alarming rates. Boys are often expected to contribute to family income through labor, or they are drawn into street life, militancy, and other negative influences. This phenomenon is not just detrimental to the boys themselves but poses broader societal risks, including increased crime rates and a less educated workforce.

The following observation have been made in recent years:

1. Enrollment: Boys' enrollment in schools is lower than girls', particularly in the northern regions (UNICEF, 2020).

2. Dropout Rates: Boys are more likely to drop out of school than girls, often due to poverty, lack of interest, or bullying (UNESCO, 2019).

3. Performance: Boys' academic performance is generally lower than girls', especially in core subjects like mathematics and English (WAEC, 2020).

4. Vocational Training: Boys have limited access to vocational training, leaving them without alternative skills or career paths (ITF, 2019).

The Ripple Effects on Society

The neglect of boys' education has far-reaching implications for society. An uneducated male population can lead to increased social instability, as young men without education or vocational skills are more likely to engage in criminal activities. Additionally, the lack of education diminishes economic productivity and hinders national development. Educated men are crucial for various sectors, including

healthcare, education, and governance. When boys are deprived of educational opportunities, the ripple effect can destabilize these sectors, leading to a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

The neglect of the male child's education has far-reaching consequences, both individually and societally. Some of the effects include:

- Increased dropout rates: Boys who fall behind in education are more likely to drop out of school, leading to a higher risk of unemployment, poverty, and involvement in criminal activities (Adeyemi, 2017).

- Reduced economic productivity: Education is a crucial factor in determining an individual's earning potential and contribution to the economy. Neglecting the male child's education can lead to reduced economic productivity and competitiveness (World Bank, 2018).

- Social unrest and violence: Idle and disillusioned youth can become perpetrators of violence and social unrest, posing a significant threat to national security (Ogbu, 2013).

- Perpetuation of gender stereotypes: The neglect of the male child's education can reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, limiting their potential and perpetuating gender-based discrimination (UNESCO, 2017).

The Need for a Paradigm Shift

To address these challenges, a paradigm shift is essential—one that recognizes the importance of educating both girls and boys. This shift should encompass policy changes, community engagement, and the implementation of targeted programs that address the specific needs of boys.

Policy Changes:

Government Initiatives: The Nigerian government should develop policies that specifically aim to retain boys in schools. These policies could include incentives for families to keep their sons in school and penalties for child labor practices that pull boys out of education.

Curriculum Development: Educational curricula should be inclusive and engaging for boys, incorporating vocational training and skills development to cater to those who may not follow a traditional academic path.

Community Engagement:

Parental Involvement: Parents and guardians should be educated on the importance of education for boys and the long-term benefits it brings to families and communities.

Role Models: Successful male role models from various sectors should be engaged to mentor and inspire boys, showing them the potential outcomes of a good education.

Targeted Programs:

Scholarships and Financial Aid: Financial barriers are a significant reason why boys drop out of school. Scholarships and financial aid programs specifically for boys from low-income families can help mitigate this issue.

Rehabilitation Programs: For boys who have already dropped out, rehabilitation programs that offer a second chance at education or vocational training can reintegrate them into productive roles in society.

Vocational and Technical Training: Including vocational and technical training in the education system can make education more relevant and attractive to boys who might be inclined towards practical and skill-based careers (Global Campaign for Education, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The topic "Protecting the Male Child Education in Nigeria: A Paradigm Shift" can be effectively analyzed through the Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). The theory posits that human development is shaped by the interaction of various environmental systems, each nested within one another. In Nigeria, the immediate environments that impact male child education include:

Family: Traditionally, boys might be prioritized for education over girls due to cultural norms. However, economic pressures might also push boys into early labor to support their families, affecting their educational opportunities.

School: Schools must be equipped to address the specific needs of male students, including tailored support programs and gender-sensitive teaching approaches. The quality of teaching, availability of male role models, and school facilities play critical roles.

Peer Groups: Male peers can influence each other's attitudes toward education. Peer pressure might either encourage or dissuade academic engagement depending on the prevailing group norms.

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy (2000) also offers a powerful lens for analyzing and addressing the educational challenges faced by male children in Nigeria. Freire's approach emphasizes the role of education in liberating marginalized groups by fostering critical consciousness and challenging oppressive systems.

Critical Pedagogy Overview

Critical Pedagogy focuses on the following key principles:

Dialogical Method: Emphasizes dialogue between teachers and students to co-create knowledge, moving away from the traditional "banking model" of education where students passively receive information.

Problem-Posing Education: Encourages students to critically examine their world and reflect on their socio-political context.

Conscientization: Developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action.

Empowerment: Education should empower students to challenge and transform oppressive structures in society.

Application to Male Child Education in Nigeria

1. Dialogical Method

In the context of protecting male child education in Nigeria, the dialogical method involves creating a participatory learning environment where male students are active contributors:

Teacher-Student Collaboration: Educators should engage male students in dialogue about their experiences, challenges, and aspirations. This approach respects their voices and fosters a sense of agency.

Community Involvement: Schools can facilitate forums where male students, parents, and community members discuss educational barriers and collaboratively seek solutions. This aligns with Freire's emphasis on dialogue across all societal levels.

2. Problem-Posing Education

Freire's problem-posing model encourages critical thinking and reflection on societal issues that affect male education:

Contextual Learning: Curriculum should incorporate real-life issues that male students face, such as economic pressures, cultural expectations, and labor demands. This helps students relate education to their lived experiences and critically analyze these challenges.

Critical Discussions: Encourage male students to question and critique societal norms and policies that impact their education. For example, why certain economic practices might prioritize child labor over schooling and how this could be changed.

3. Conscientization

Developing a critical consciousness among male students involves helping them understand the socio-economic and political forces affecting their education:

Awareness Programs: Implement programs that educate male students about their rights and the importance of education in overcoming socio-economic barriers. Such programs can include workshops on labor laws, educational rights, and the benefits of continued schooling.

Reflective Exercises: Use activities that prompt male students to reflect on their personal experiences with education and how larger societal issues influence these experiences. This can empower them to take action to improve their educational outcomes.

4. Empowerment

Critical Pedagogy aims to empower students to transform their conditions:

Leadership Training: Provide leadership and advocacy training for male students to enable them to become active participants in their communities and advocate for educational reforms.

Community Projects: Involve male students in community projects that address local educational challenges. For example, initiating campaigns to reduce child labor or to improve school facilities can empower students by giving them a direct role in creating change.

Conclusion

The future of Nigeria hinges on the balanced education of all its children, both boys and girls. While the strides made in promoting girls' education are commendable, it is crucial to recognize and address the growing educational neglect of the male child. The adverse effects of this neglect are far-reaching, impacting not only the individual lives of these boys but also the broader socio-economic stability and development of the nation.

A paradigm shift is essential—one that fosters an inclusive educational framework that values and supports the educational needs of boys. This shift requires comprehensive policy reforms, community engagement, and targeted programs to ensure that boys remain in school and are equipped with the skills needed to contribute meaningfully to society. By prioritizing the education of the male child alongside that of the female child, Nigeria can harness the full potential of its youth, paving the way for a more prosperous and equitable future.

Investing in boys' education is not merely an act of balancing scales but a strategic move to enhance national development. It is time for Nigeria to adopt a holistic approach to education, one that leaves no child behind and secures a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

References

Adeyemi, T. O. (2017). *Boys' Underachievement in Education: A Review of the Literature. Journal of Education and Human Development*, 6(1), 1-13.

Banks, J. A. (2015). Cultural Diversity and Education. Routledge.

Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2010). Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives. Wiley.

Boma, R. A., Nasigba, A., & Victor, A. O. (2022). *Boy Child Education in Primary Schools for Sustainable Democracy, Peace and Unity in Nigeria. Direct Research*

Journal of Social Science and Educational Studies, 10(4), 36-40. Available at: Direct Research Journal

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design. Harvard University Press.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities. Polity Press.

Dewey, J. (1916). Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education. Macmillan.

Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., ... & Shriver, T. P. (1997). Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators. ASCD.

Freire, P. (2000). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Continuum.

Fielding, M. (2001). Beyond the Rhetoric of Student Voice: New Departures or New Constraints in the Transformation of 21st Century Schooling? Forum, 43(2), 100-109.

Global Campaign for Education. (2021). Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education – All Means All.

Available at: Global Campaign for Education

Gurian, M., & Stevens, K. (2005). The Minds of Boys: Saving Our Sons From Falling Behind in School and Life. Jossey-Bass.

Gutmann, A. (1999). Democratic Education. Princeton University Press.

Levin, H. M. (2003). Cost-effectiveness: A Primer. In H. M. Levin & P. J. McEwan (Eds.), Cost-Effectiveness and Educational Policy. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Offorma, G. C. (2019). *Educational Imbalance: The Case of the Boy-Child. African Educational Research Journal,* 7(3), 112-120. Available at: African Educational Research Journal

Ogbu, J. U. (2013). *The Consequences of Neglecting Boys' Education in Nigeria. Journal of African Studies and Development*, 5(2), 1-12.

Skelton, C. (2001). Schooling the Boys: Masculinities and Primary Education. Open University Press.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2001). How to Differentiate Instruction in Mixed-Ability Classrooms. ASCD.

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI). (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from UNGEI

Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria. (2019). National Policy on Education. Retrieved from Federal Ministry of Education

ITF (2019). Vocational Training in Nigeria: A Review.

UNESCO (2019). Education for Sustainable Development: A Framework for Action.

UNICEF Nigeria. (2021). Education. Retrieved from UNICEF

WAEC (2020). West African Examinations Council: Annual Report.

World Bank. (2020). Addressing the Challenges of Secondary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved from World Bank