

INVESTIGATING THE NEED FOR EMPOWERMENT - ORIENTED CURRICULUM FOR GIRLS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the need for empowerment-oriented curriculum for girls. The study which covered one university each from Anambra and Enugu States respectively was guided by three research questions. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire. The major finding was that the girls did not manifest adequate self-confidence. It was concluded that girl-empowerment ideals should be reflected in all aspects of curriculum development and implementation for girls. Among the recommendations was that girls should be exposed to empowerment-oriented curriculum to enable them develop self-respect, self-confidence and the ability to take intelligent decisions.

Introduction

The problem of the marginalized positions of women in different societies has been a common topic for international discussions since the 1960s. Prior to this time, women lived in the world of men, judged by standards set by men and considered by men as being of inferior intelligence, full of trivial ideas and not to be trusted with tasks that require intelligence and sense of responsibility. Consequently the only safe place for the women was the home, where they were guided and protected by men. The high cost of this protection was that over the years, women were subdued (Goetz, 1991), used for the provision of cheap labour force (Rowbotham, 1992), and made to accept that they were incapable of thinking for themselves and not to talk about others.

However, Qunta (1987:23) notes that

contrary to the more popularly held view, African women on a continent – wide scale enjoyed great freedom and had both a legal and social equality which, among other things enabled them to become effective heads of state and military strategists.

Among the prominent women leaders mentioned by Qunta are Queen Hatshepsut (15th Century Bc) who reigned for twenty-two years as the greatest woman pharaoh of black Egypt; Queen of Sheba who ruled Ethiopia in 960 Bc (mentioned in both the Bible and the Koran; Queen Cleopatra of Egypt; (C. 69 – 30 Bc) Queen Zinga of Angola and Ndongo (C.1581-1663) who fought for forty years and frustrated the efforts of the Portuguese to colonize her country; Queen Aminatu of Nigeria who reigned from around 1536 to 1573 and who personally led her army of twenty thousand men in various battles and conquered most of their neighbouring states and

Nehandra of Zimbabwe (C.1862-98) who was a religious leader and an army commander. Nehandra was executed on 27 April 1898.

Uchendu (1993:vii) who shares the same view with Qunta observes that while in Europe “women were over protected and thus became completely dependent”, the “Nigerian women were active in public life”, Uchendu clearly demonstrated the active roles played by Nigerian women in pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods in Nigeria. She however notes that colonialism affected everyone in Nigeria. She (1993:xiii) quotes Hafkin as stating that “African women lost political, as well as economic status under colonial rule”. After four decades of post independence, one would have expected Nigerian women to have regained from this negative colonial influence. However, it appears that a majority of women have accepted their marginalized positions in the society and consented to a life of total dependence on men. This is reflected on girls’ apathy to struggle to put in their best into life activities. In this regard, Apter (1993:166) observes that the problem of women is “not thwarted ambition but the failure to develop ambition”. Apter laments that the girl may even

try to suppress her talent, as it threatens the easy relationships with those who expect her compliance ... The real tragedy is that her defeat, though not self-inflicted is self-assured. She does not have even a single chance, because she does not give herself a chance.

How then can girls be re-oriented to recognize their natural abilities? Uche (1994) and Okolonta in Akumadu (1995) among others are of the view that the solution is in proper education. If Apter’s assertion is correct with regard to Nigerian girls then there is need for proper education to be given to these girls. In this regard, the type of education that is required is not just

general education but the type that is presented in empowerment-oriented curriculum. Kirkwood (1993:33) defines empowerment as “the process through which an individual discovers the potency and value of her own resources and abilities”. Young (1993:158) adds that “the parameters of empowerment are: building a positive self image and self-confidence, developing the ability to think critically, building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action”. Consequently empowerment oriented curriculum implies the type of curriculum in which the elements such as instructional objectives, learning experiences, content, methodology and evaluation are geared towards developing in girls the ability to demonstrate positive self image, self confidence, think critically, form group cohesion, take appropriate decisions and act’, rationally at every event. If Nigerian girls are exposed to empowerment – oriented curriculum, there is no doubt that these girls will attain maximum self development to enable them contribute effectively to life activities in the home and in the society. Obanya (2004:69) quotes the UNDP’S Human Development Report (2002) which indicates that “on the average, a woman’s income is barely 42% of a man’s income”. Uche (1994:5) argues that cross-cultural perceptions of women as well as low aspiration constitute inhibiting factors to Nigerian women. Barnfield (1992) confirms that girls are disempowered by elements in both the explicit and the hidden curriculum. Are Nigerian girls empowered or disempowered by the curriculum elements through which they acquire learning? Is the education given to these girls actually equipping them with the knowledge of the potency and value of their “own resources and abilities”? (Kirkwood, 1993:33). Do these girls need empowerment oriented curriculum? These are some of the questions that present the problems of this study

Research Questions

1. To what extent do girls manifest adequate self-confidence?
2. To what extent do girls have confidence in female leadership?
3. What family duties do girls most frequently ascribe to the female?

Research Method

Design and Area: A questionnaire survey design was adopted for the study which covered two universities in Anambra and Enugu States respectively.

Population and Sample: The population consisted of all the 1350 second year undergraduate female students in the area of study. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting a sample of 300 students.

Instrument: For the collection of data, a survey instrument, which consisted of 30 items, was used. The items were structured on a four point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Validation: Using the research questions and purpose of study, two lecturers from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, validated the instrument, Based on this exercise, two items were rephrased.

Reliability: This was ascertained by administering a sample of the questionnaire on 30 second year female undergraduate students at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The scores were grouped according to odd and even numbered items. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was computed and this gave a coefficient of internal consistency

of 0.82. when the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula for correction was applied a score of 0.90 was obtained for internal consistency.

Method of Analysis: The obtained data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. To facilitate understanding of the analysis, strongly agree and agree were combined into one scale of Agree while disagree and strongly disagree were classified as Disagree.

Result

Table 1: The Adequacy of Girls' Manifestation of Self-confidence.

S/n	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1	To succeed in life a person needs help from people	277	92.3	23	7.7
2	Success depends on self determination	227	75.7	73	24.3
3	A good girl shows complete obedience to the boy or man she really loves	205	68.3	95	31.7
4	A girl can achieve as much as a boy	105	35.0	195	65.0
5	Boys perform better than girls academically	179	59.7	121	40.3

6	A person can do any job regardless of gender	64	21.3	236	78.7
7	You always consult people before taking a decision	198	66.0	102	34.0
8	You blame people for the consequences of your decisions.	68	22.7	232	77.3
9	You change your mind based on your feelings	239	79.7	61	20.3
10	Your parents or your husband will always take care of you	71	23.7	229	76.3

Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 9 in table 1 show that a majority of the respondents did not manifest adequate self-confidence.

Table 2: Extent of Girls' Confidence in Female Leadership

S/n	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
	You want Nigeria to have a female Head of State	120	40.0	180	60.0
	You want a female Governor in your State	112	37.3	188	62.7
	You will like to work under a female	53	17.7	247	82.3

	leader				
	Women are not capable leaders	206	68.7	94	31.3
	Women leaders are often confused	215	71.7	85	28.3
	Women leaders resist bribery and corruption better than male leaders	232	77.3	68	22.7

Items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in table 2 show that the respondents did not have much confidence in female leadership.

Table 3: Family Duties Ascribed to Women by the Girls.

S/n	Items	Agree		Disagree	
		F	%	F	%
1	Making family decisions	118	39.3	182	60.7
2	Taking care of the children	211	70.3	89	29.7
3	Carrying firewood	179	59.7	121	40.3
4	Cooking	300	100	-	-
5	Attending party meetings	82	27.3	218	72.7
6	Taking children to school	192	64.0	108	36.0
7	Paying house rent	-	-	300	100.0
8	Maintaining the family car	-	-	300	100.0
9	Paying electricity bill	-	-	300	100.0
10	Taking the car to the mechanic	25	8.3	275	91.7

11	Doing minor repairs in the house	213	71.0	87	29.0
12	Looking after the baby	300	100.0	-	-
13	Nursing the sick	300	100.0	-	-
14	Taking care of the house	300	100.0	-	-
15	Providing money for food.	-	-	300	100.0

Items 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15 in table 3 show that a majority of the respondents ascribed duties to the women in line with the pattern of division of labour in traditional societies.

DISCUSSION

This study has revealed that to a great extent, the respondents did not manifest adequate self – confidence, self- respect and self-esteem. Girls with this type of inner belief system cannot contribute effectively to life in the society. At best they become actions and not reactors to life events. They limit themselves to dancing to the tune played by others without taking the risk of initiating or varying the tune. This unfortunate situation makes Hay (1997: xii) to declare that.

Inner self-worth and self-esteem are the most important things a woman can possess. ... When our self-worth is strong, we will not accept positions of inferiority and abuse. We only give into domination from others because we accept and believe that we are “no good” or worthless.

It is surprising that the girls in this study did not show much confidence in female leadership despite affirming that women leaders do resist bribery and corruption better than the men. Even in the political activities, Urdang (1984:161) declares that “once in motion they (the women) often surpassed the political commitment of their male comrades”. Even Chant (1997:160) affirms that “in terms of economic welfare, household management and authority patterns, the male-headed nuclear unit displays certain characteristics which are less desirable than those of female-headed households”. Though these assertions need to be proved empirically, one wonders why the girls used in this study showed lack of confidence in female leadership. During a discussion with some of these girls, they revealed to the researcher that their lack of confidence in female leadership is due to the fact that they perceived female leaders as being stricter than the males. Consequently, these girls thought it would be easier for them to deal with the male rather than the female leaders. Also, the respondents in this study assigned traditional sex – roles to women. Umoh (2004:1) observes that “when we sex-stereotype roles, we directly or indirectly limit full participation of individual as well as limit full development of individual potentials”. As a solution, Kanno (2004) recommends the elimination of gender stereotype in the curriculum. The finding of this study validates the ideas of Maisamari (2002:37) that “in Nigeria, the women’s roles are predominantly those of child rearing and house keeping”.

The girls used in this study responded in line with the disempowering educational experiences they have been exposed to since childhood. While reacting to a similar situation, Oke (2005:51) opines that “there are several ways in which educational practices and procedures have created barriers to women’s participation in all forms of education.” Consequently, Obanya

(2004) suggests a solution by presenting EFA's envisioned aim of education for women and girls as being geared towards ensuring their full empowerment by raising their status psychologically, intellectually, technically, socially, economically and politically. Girls can acquire this type of education when empowerment oriented curriculum is effectively implemented it is no longer enough to give girls the type of education that prepares them for traditional roles. The current rate at which developments in information technology are affecting life activities indicate that girls need the type of education that can make it possible for them to attain the maximum development of their potentialities. This type of education can be delivered through empowerment-oriented curriculum.

Conclusion And Recommendations

It has been shown in this study that there is need for empowerment oriented curriculum for girls. This does not imply developing for girls curriculum that differs from that presented to the boys. Rather what is needed is the inculcation of girl-empowerment ideals into all aspects of curriculum development and implementation. In this regard, it is recommended that effort in curriculum development and implementation should be geared towards developing the following qualities in girls:

1. self-respect and self confidence,
2. ability to take intelligent decisions,
3. willingness to put in one's best in any activity; and
4. trust in other people's ability to perform creditably irrespective of gender.

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