

EXPLORING OUT REACH COUNSELLING IN PROMOTING GIRL-CHILD LITERACY IN ABUJA RURAL AREAS

Uchenna E. Enem, PhD

Department of Educational Foundations

Veritas University, Abuja

euchariauchenna@yahoo.co.uk

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Ifeoma C. Enem

Counselling and Educational Psychology

University of Abuja

ifeoma.enem@louisvilleabuja.sch.ng

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Abstract

Girls' education is a fundamental human right which acquaints them with the right skills and intelligence to assist the whole family and the nation. Connecting and engaging the girl-child in education therefore is an enviable structure for personal and sustainable development. To this effect, this study x-rayed the poor enrollment status of the rural girls in school, identified the impediments to their literacy and showcased how the outreach community counselling could be a lasting solution to the problem. To achieve the objective of this study, a total of 150 out of school girls of between 10 and 18 years from three rural communities in Abuja were sampled. Three research questions were raised to guide the study, descriptive survey research design was adopted and a 20 item questionnaire was employed for the collection of data. The finding evinced different levels of impediments to girl-child literacy in the three communities out of which, early marriage, socio-cultural patterns and poverty rated highest. It was also revealed that many of the girls who enrolled in the primary school did not complete and so, a few of them transited to junior secondary school. Based on the findings, the study explored the packages of Out Reach Community counselling as the implication of the situation and recommended among other factors the need for the government to promote the satellite outreach counselling in the rural areas. Through this medium, the rural populace would be sensitized on the importance of girl-child education.

Keywords: Girl-child, Literacy, Rural Area, Out Reach Counselling and Community

Introduction

Literacy is a critical issue that helps one make sense of the world we live in. It is a sort of journey which starts when a child is born and progresses throughout the

life time of the child. UNESCO (2008) defines a literate person as the one who can engage in activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own and the community development. Given the definition, UNESCO (2008) characterised literacy as being a fundamental human right. Human right to inclusive educational opportunities for individuals is non-negotiable and are aspects of being human that the social contract must respect (Luckasson, 2006). Both sexes, the girls and the boys in every nation have the equal right to education to gain literacy. Literacy is a process of continuous learning which enables individuals to achieve their goals, to enhance their knowledge and skills, and to participate in all aspects of life endeavour. Despite all the efforts by Nigerian government and non-governmental organisations, girl-child illiteracy is still a case in point. In 2017 Nigeria's Annual Education Conference titled "Achieving Inclusive Education through Innovative Strategies", Mr Sunny Echono, the Permanent Secretary of the ministry of Education who represented the minister then, pointed out that females account for the 60% of the country's illiterate population. He therefore suggested that to win the war of illiteracy, Nigerians should focus intensely on girls and women (PTN, 2017). Has the country really focused intensely on girls' education?

A girl child is a female under the age of 18 or a person's female child from birth to full growth, an unmarried girl or a girl friend or immature woman. For many of Nigerian girls especially in the rural areas, literacy is a wishful thinking. Story of a young girl was told in the Daily Trust of Saturday June 15, 2017. The girl had the dream of being a professional nurse. Her dream emanated from admiring a community nurse who worked in the clinic in their locality. This lady started primary school but at primary four, the parents sent her to work as a maid in the city cutting short her dream. As a maid, she was paid a monthly salary that was sent to the parents. At the time of the interview, she was 21 years old and has given up the hope of going to school because her parents planned giving her out in marriage. This story is one out of many.

Girl-child deprivation of education has been a topical issue because the wrong perspective families have about girls in the culture have left many girls uneducated especially in the rural areas. The girl child education is of paramount importance; it is a medium through which she acquires skills and knowledge to advance her status for social interactions and self improvement. In turn, she

Counselling in any of the stated outreach counselling programme may include; career counselling, personal or group counselling, conflict resolution, educational counselling, anger management techniques, study skills etc (Government of Alberta 2009). This outreach counselling could be of benefit to a wide range of people who may include;

- drop out from school
- education disadvantaged people requiring functional literacy
- those who may require special education needs
- those who may require specialised health care
- students who are talented or gifted
- people experiencing abuses or forced into non-consented activities

The target population for this work is the girls in the rural areas where there are more illiterates according to facts for example; UNESCO, 2014. A rural area is an area of land outside the densely populated urban areas in a town or city. Madu (2010: 178) defined rural area as “areas of low population density, utilizing land extensively and exhibiting distinctive social characteristics associated with the rural setting”. The main industries in most rural areas are agriculture, wildlife and poultry. Apart from dispersed population, rural areas are characterised by lack of access to major services and activities which represent common facilities for people living in the urban cities. Such amenities as schools, hospitals, sports, cultural facilities etc. These lack and other problems have inadvertently struck the populace in the rural areas with poverty and other disadvantages. Girls in the rural areas have problems inside the already existing problem due to gender disparity. Irrespective of the natural lack in the rural areas, girls and women are excluded significantly from many sectors of the economy of which education is one and has hampered on their empowerment. Ravinder et al (2009) has posited that in many African countries especially in the rural areas, parents still prefer to send the boys to school, seeing little need to send the girls to school, hence illiteracy is still evident in most African countries.

A study carried out by the Natural Resources Management and environment Department 2010 reveals that, illiteracy among women has deprived them the ability to read and understand the written material provided by extension programmes that educate farmers (Mtsor & Idisi, 2014). In addition to this, Anselm et al (2014) noted that education plays a significant role in positively influencing the status of women in farm decision-making than uneducated ones.

broadens her mind, tilts towards self-discovery, gets in tune with life challenges, utilises her full potentials for her empowerment and contributes significantly to the nation development. This agrees with Keefe & Copeland (2011)' assertion that literacy includes communication, contact, and expectation that interaction is possible for all individuals: literacy has the potential to lead to empowerment. A girl-child's contribution to nation building has no limit, girls are endowed with wide range of tentacles with which they reach out to human and material resources, positively towards goal achievement. Suffice it to say, a girl-child's education is education for all. Affirming this, Naussbaum (2008) posited that girl-child education plays important role in national development because of their resilience.

In order to foster the girl child education, there is need to employ the talking and supportive therapy through the process of outreach community counselling. Outreach counselling has been seen as a way of reaching individuals who cannot willingly pursue their education in traditional schools. Outreach is in congruent with "working locally which is a key dimension of government's linked anti-poverty and lifelong learning strategy". Community outreach programs are a standard way for groups such as social services agencies, counsellors, religious groups to identify a certain specific need in its community and provide services to people who need it (Alcantara, 2018). In order words, Outreach counselling refers to the effort made beyond the walls of counselling offices (or designated counselling environment) to increase the availability and utilisation of services through direct intervention and interaction with the target population (Housego, 1999). The goals of which is to help the individuals to create awareness through understanding themselves, their environmental and relationship influences as to be able to adjust properly in the society.

The main thrust of Outreach counselling is that the services are taken to the target group's own environment. There are four types of outreach counselling; the satellite outreach which entails the establishment of centres for the delivery of the programme. The domiciliary outreach counselling, this refers to counselling undertaken in the homes of the target groups through visits to their homes. The two other types are detached outreach: counselling undertaken outside agency contacts such as streets, clubs or railway; and the peripatetic outreach which is the counselling undertaken in the community-based agencies like hotels, schools, prisons etc.

Consequent upon this, the education of rural women is very important for their progressive participation in sustainable development.

The purpose of this work therefore is to find out the girl-child level of attainment of basic education and the constraints they encounter in attaining quality education. It is also to explore the outreach community counselling in assisting them achieve the all-important quality education.

Research Questions

The following Research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. Is there any gap between the enrolment rate of the girls and their completion rate in the primary school section?
2. What is their level of attainment of basic education?
3. What are the impediments to the rural girls' literacy in the three communities of Abuja rural Areas?

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study and was carried out in three rural areas in Abuja namely; Dobi in Gwagwalada Area Council, Pegi in Kuje area Council and Igu in Bwari Area Council. The samples for the study were 150 out of school girls who were randomly picked by the local chiefs' cabinet personnel. Fifty girls were selected from each village. Local interpreters assisted the researcher to ease communication.

The instrument for the data collection was a 20- item questionnaire of "yes or no" questions because of the level of the respondents. The Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to determine the internal consistency of the items and the reliability co-efficient of 0.79 was obtained. The instrument had three sections; the first section verified the subjects' enrolment into schools and their drop out status. The second part checked the girls' level of completion of JSS, and the final sections were short structured items on impediments of literacy.

The data collected were analysed and presented on frequency tables using percentages and simple head counts.

Results

Table 1: overview of the respondents' ages and drop out status

S/N	Age interval	No	No Never enrolled	Drop out in prim. sch.	Transition to JSS
1	10-12	39	18	21	2
2	12-14	38	15	23	N/A
3	14-16	53	11	34	8
4	16-18	20	11	08	1
TOTAL		150	55	86	11
Percentage		100%	36%	57%	7%

The respondents were classified according to their ages and from the table, 36% of the girls have never attempted going to school while 57% of them dropped out in the primary school. A hand full of them got to Junior Secondary school but couldn't go further. None of them in this category was able to express herself in English language let alone displayed ability in mathematics. The 7% that transited to JSS did not write the Junior WAEC, they dropped out along the line.

Table 2: Distribution of the girls on the different impediments they encountered

S/N	Nature of impediment	Number of girls	Percentage
1	Lack of information services	21	14.00
2	Early Marriages	36	24.00
3	Teenage Pregnancy	4	2.67
4	Socio-cultural patterns	31	20.67
5	Religious misconceptions	13	8.67
6	Infrastructural deficit	2	1.33
7	Teachers' attitude	8	5.33

8	Difficulty in Learning	12	8.00
9	Poverty	23	15.33
	TOTAL	150	100%

Table 2 indicates the nature of the impediments to the girl-child education. The highest indicator as observed from the table is the early marriage which is 24% of the respondents. The next is socio-cultural factors, 31 of the respondents which is 20.66% of the sample could not attain literacy because of the stipulations of their culture. Poverty is rated by 23 respondents, representing 15.33% of the sample and lack of information at 14%. Infrastructure is the least at 1.33% of the sample.

Discussions of Findings

Table 1 shows the age intervals of the respondent and their enrolment status in school. Out of a sample of 150, only 86 tasted the four walls of the primary school. For reasons which is not their fault, a few of them at 7% transited to Junior secondary. This is human right deprivation and didn't conform to Luckasson (2006) assertion. Be it the case, many girls did not achieve basic education and so can neither read nor write. Invariably, parents in the rural areas still see education as boys' thing agreeing to Ravinder et al, 2009 about boys' preference. The table 2 is a display of the impediments to the girl-child education in Abuja rural areas. The major impediment is the early marriage saga. Many parents in the rural areas are still giving their children out in marriage as soon as suitors indicate interest. Early marriage remains the most prevalent reason why the girls give up education. The story of the little girl who couldn't go to school because of early marriage as reported in the Daily Trust, July, 2017 is a case in point. The culture of using the girl-child as a tool for generating incomes to the family is another problem as it rated second on the list. Nigerian women do 70% of agricultural work force yet get less of accruing returns (PTN, 2015). Poverty is another cankerworm eating into the fabrics of the rural populace. Some parents were not able to provide books, uniforms, and other materials to sustain their children in school. Information they say is power, the rural populace lack information, the lack of which contributes to illiteracy. The other indices are also impediments to literacy but not as high as the first four.

Exploring the outreach counselling to promote girl-child literacy in the rural areas

Outreach counselling as stated earlier is a counselling form, away from the comfort of the counselling offices or official setting to the location of the target group. Outreach counselling is a way of contacting and working with marginalised groups. It can be conducted amongst any target groups of people who may need it. It implies liaising with the community organizations, mounting programmes in community locations and working in an informal way with people in the different locations to resolve an identified needs.

In this regard satellite outreach counselling will be adopted, a situation of establishing centres in the community for service delivery and the target groups are the girls. Through the community chiefs/ organizations, centres can be allocated for the outreach programmes at close intervals for easy access by the target group, the former would also help the counsellor/therapists in identifying the following;

- Girls who are drop out from schools (for any reason)
- Girls who have not enrolled in school for the first time
- Families that don't support girl-child education

Through the intake process of the outreach counselling, these girls will be grouped according to their needs, listened to, use a variety of activities to maintain a positive atmosphere and reinforce their efforts.

At this point the identified populace could be counselled. The most appropriate type of counselling for this set of people are (1) face-to-face counselling. Face-to-face counselling in outreach programme implies that the counsellors visit the clients at their homes or meets at the centre, and engages in counseling relationship at her own familiar place. This may take number of times. (2) Group Counselling: This is a form of counselling where people with homogenous problem come together, the counsellor facilitates the group while everyone talks and also listens to each other. Group counselling as a channel for delivering outreach counselling service is very effective in handling large number of people at a time (McLeod, 2009). In this counselling the girls may be exposed to doing projects, team building or physical games, to build their confidence and motivate them towards developing themselves. (3) Family Counselling: family counselling is required for the families that oppose girl-child literacy, families who prefer their girls working on the farm or hawking goods. Family counselling will unify members of the family because one cannot disentangle the difficulty faced by the girls from the web of the family beliefs and relationship with which they live

their life. (4) Information services: the outreach counselling programme provides a good avenue to counsel the girls on the advantages of modern education and availing them of some literacy programmes. This will help disabuse their minds of the religious/cultural misconception they have on literacy.

Information on government and non-governmental organization agencies that can supply aids to the families who are out of school because of poverty, can also be accessed through the outreach counselling. There is need for the counsellors to collaborate with responsibly bodies for poverty alleviation and make recommendation when the poverty stricken families are identified through the outreach initial access.

Outreach counselling entails the counsellors establishing rapport and creating friendly atmosphere with the rural populace in general and the girls in particular. This will boost their integrity, acquaintance them with the right frame of mind and positive attitude towards education.

Conclusion

Education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills (Aliu, 2001). Outreach counselling will enhance the implementation of the government and non-governmental laudable programmes towards eradicating illiteracy among women for instance, the Nigerian Girls' Education Initiative, the Ambassador's Girls' Schooling Programme, Strategy for Accelerating Girls' Education in Nigeria (SAGEN) etc. Actually, programmes are instituted but the impact is not felt giving reason for enlisting Nigeria among the developing countries having high rate of female illiteracy. Satellite outreach counselling is a medium to disseminate information that is capable of sensitizing the rural masses of the importance of girl-child education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings from the study.

1. Nigerian government should train and engage many Guidance Counsellors to embark on outreach counselling in the rural area to sensitize and counsel the populace on girls-child literacy.
2. The three tiers of Government should ensure that all Adult literacy programmes have sections for counselling, whereby a trained counsellor is fully engaged.

3. Parents should desist from encouraging and supporting early marriages for their daughters to enable them attain basic education.
4. The village chiefs and their cabinet crews should be encouraged to form associations for stamping out illiteracy in their different localities. In this regard, they will see literacy advocacy as their responsibility.

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