The Nigerian Educational Psychologists Vol. 21 No. 1, August, 2024. pp. 270-280

VALUE EDUCATION, LANGUAGE SECURITY & GENDERED LIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: FOCUS ON NIGERIAN GIRL-CHILD

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Abstract

All sustainable development goals (SDGS) depend on the achievement of Goal 5 which is gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls by 2030. Research reveals that there are about 10.5ml out-of-school children index in Nigeria, which includes the Girl-child as a result of incidence of early-child marriage, poverty, illiteracy, prostitution, amongst others .Girl Child education is crucial for national development, and the role of women and their potential values cannot be underestimated. This is so because the education of every child starts from the family and the mother is the first teacher. Value education and girl child training are interconnected and complementary aspects of a comprehensive education in order to shape character and personality. To achieve the objective of this perspective, systemic functional linguistic (SFL), which highlights the function of language, the descriptive system of data analysis, the primary and secondary data collection methods were employed in order to highlight significantly the importance of proper mentoring. This paper concludes that effective language education, and proper training will give value and groom Nigerian female genders on their roles and positive contribution to national development. 'Train one girl-child, train a nation'

Key Words: language, Girl-Child, value education, sustainable.

Introduction

Language is generally viewed as a means of communication and a vital tool for social behavior. The language we learn and use both reflects and reinforces cultural views and values, including those about gender. We use language to organize our experience and perceptions. As cited by Schultz (2022), a Female gender is frequently defined by appearance or by relationship with others, whereas a man is typically defined by his activities, accomplishments, or positions. For instance, coverage of women's sports frequently focuses more on women's athletes' appearance than on their athletic skills.

To mark the ten-year anniversary of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Wellbeing Foundation Africa (WBF)

joined the international community in denouncing FGM as a human rights violation as well as a form of domestic violence. WBF called upon the Nigerian House of Representatives to promptly pass the Violence Against Persons Prohibition bill and make all forms of FGM illegal, The Wellbeing Foundation Africa (2024). Non tolerance and sensitization on awareness on Female Genital Mutilation is an important value in the life of a girl child education in the process of teaching and learning that focuses on developing essential values and principles that guide an individual's behavior, decision-making, and relationships. It aims to instill in students a sense of purpose, responsibility, and respect for themselves, others, and the community, Seth (2019).

One way that language demeans female folks is through the use of male generic word, which purports to include both women and men yet refers specifically only to men. Examples of male generic words are nouns such as businessman, chairman, mailman, and mankind, and pronouns such as he used to refer to both women and men. Some people think that there is no problem with male generic diction and that using inclusive language, such as he or she, is just about political correctness.
Research on Inclusive Language Guide (2019) makes it clear that inclusive language is about something far more substantial than political correctness. It also states that inclusive language helps to promote respect and understanding for diverse groups." In a classic study of the effects of male generics, Schneider & Hacker (2018) confirm that, children were asked to select photographs for a textbook with chapter entitled "urban man" and "Man in Politics Behavior." The children almost always chose pictures of men when the titles included male generic language. When the titles did not refer only to men, the children chose more photographs that portrayed both sexes. The titles shared what they thought was appropriate to include in the chapters. Stories about female athletes often emphasize wardrobes for example, Mary is sporting a cool new outfit, or making reference to female bodies, they suggest "she's gotten back in shape and is looking good on the field" and hairstyles (She's wearing a shorter cut with highlights), whereas stories about male athletes focus on their athletic abilities. This study is an attempt to reveal that misuse of words or wrong diction in communication with female folks instigates fear, anxiety, insecurity and negative effect.

Objectives

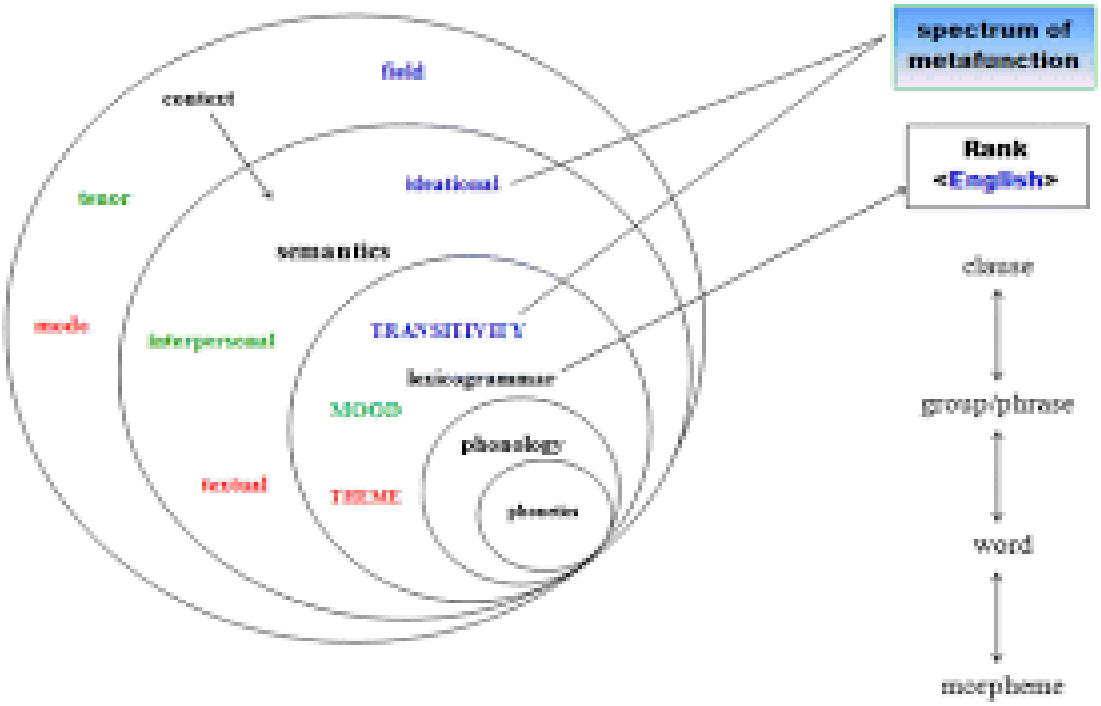
1. To assess the impact of appropriate diction in girl-child empowerment and value education.
2. To reveal that proper Language education rightly instills security and confidence in a girl-child.

Methodology

The population survey was taken from pupils in primary schools and teens in junior secondary schools in 3 primary and 3 secondary schools respectively in Ikwuano Local Government of Abia State, South East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

In this paper, systemic functional linguistics as a model was used combined with elicitation method of identifying the generic words in every day communication which gave male folks primacy over female counterparts. Systemic functional model (figure 1 below) was chosen because it is a model that views language as a network of systems. When the wrong language is employed in communication, it generates wrong experience and understanding of the world, one's reasoning and behavior, consequently, are organized based on this experience, Hall (2013).

FIGURE 1



SOURCE: Torenhtpps://www.entrepreneur.com.slideshow/308001

The Girl- Child

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This is the age before one becomes a young adult. This period covers the crèche, nursery or early childhood (0-5 years), primary (6-12 years) and secondary school (12-18 years). During this period, the young child is totally under the care of the adult who may be her parents or guardians and older siblings (Schultz: 2002). It

is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. During this period, the child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on others, those on whom she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage.

Education and girl chid training

Education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help him/her develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005) It is a process through which an individual acquires knowledge and realizes his/her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society.

To educate means to train the mind, character and abilities of individuals. Education is a fundamental human right that should be availed to all citizens irrespective of age, sex and nationality. There are a lot of human right instruments that provide for education as a fundamental right, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO 2007)

The greatest favour people can do to themselves is "to get education" and to others "to give them education", (UNESCO 2020). According to a Chinese proverb, education is the best legacy to give to a child because "giving your child a skill is better than giving him one thousand pieces of gold."

The native traditional philosophy is that a woman's place is in her husband's kitchen and her primary role centres on her home. This belief has kept many girls away from education. The Child's Rights Act of 2003 prohibits child marriages and betrothals. In section 21 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, any marriage contracted by anyone less than 18 years old is invalid. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis, particularly in recent times, for all citizens to have access to basic education.

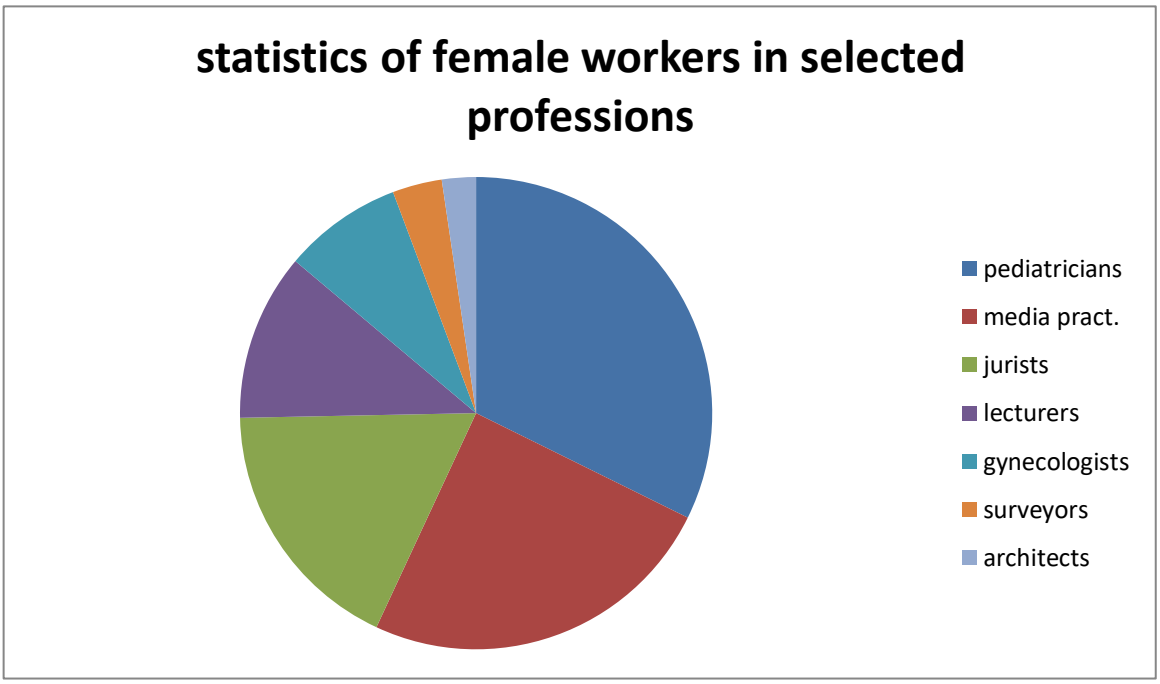
It has been established by researchers that enabling female education is crucial for national development, and the role of women cannot be underestimated. The general belief is that "when you educate a man, you educate one but when you educate a woman, you educate a nation." This is so because the education of every child starts from the family and the mother is the first teacher. Educating the girl child produces mothers who are educated and who will in turn educate their children, care for their families and provide their children.

We have vibrant and outstanding women in Nigeria like Professor Rukaiyyatu Rufai, Mrs Farida Waziri, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Author of *Purple Hibiscus*, others include Chief (Mrs) Eniola Fadayomi, Prof. Bolanle Awe, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dr Obiageli Ezekwesili, Mrs Winifred Oyo-Ita, Mrs Omobola Johnson, Mrs Sola Borha, Mrs Ibukun Awosika, Dr Sarah Alade, Mrs Toyin Sanni, Ms Arunma Oteh, Ms Hadiza Bala-Usman, Ms Funke Opeke, Mrs Bolanle Austen-Peters etc.. These are all products of great investments in the "Girl-Child Education".

Research carried out by National Statistics (2020) reveals that Abia State has one of the lowest literacy rates in Nigeria, with only 63.4% of females aged 15-24 able to read and write

Across various geo-political delineations in Nigeria, a greater percentage of school-age girls are needlessly out-of-school, compared with the ratio applicable to boys of same age grouping. According to a 2020 report by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the labor market in Abia State has a significant gender gap: Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR):Male: 85.6% Female: 63.2% Unemployment Rate: Male: 23.1%Female: 31.Underemployment Rate, Male: 25.5%,Female: 35.6%

FIGURE 2



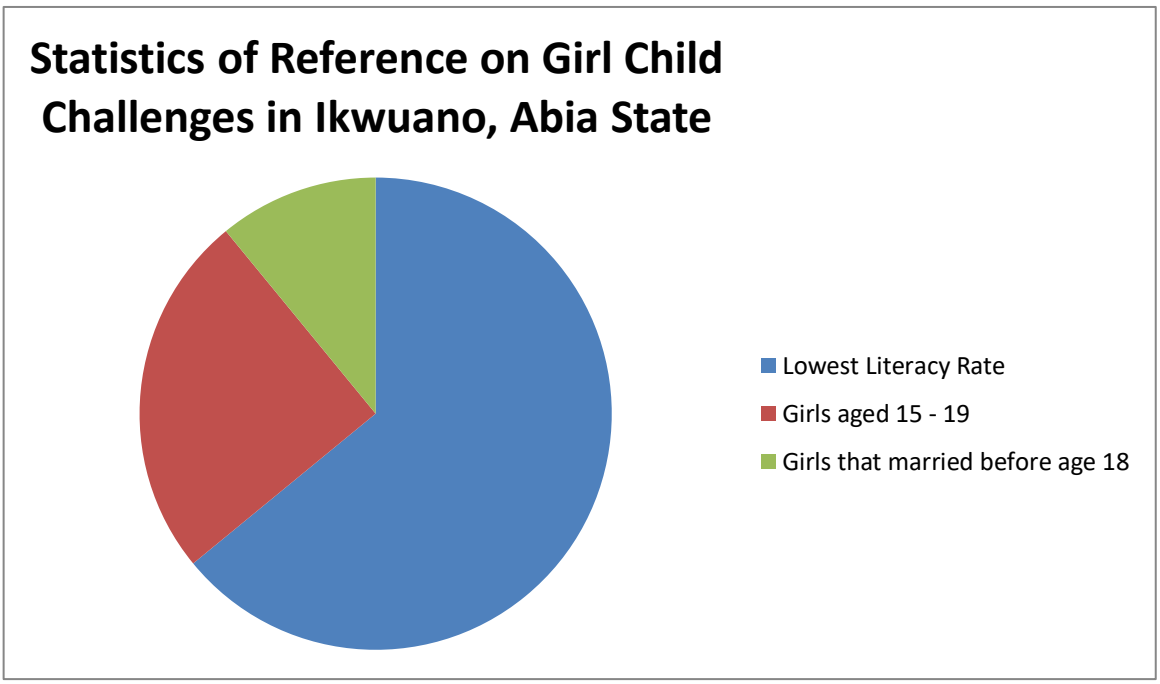
Source: UNESCO 2014

In Nigeria, from 1970 to 1994, the enrollment of girls in primary education steadily increased from 30% to as high as 80%. However, differences exist between

enrollment of males and females in all levels of education. In addition, the dropout rate of girls is higher than boys and participation in STEM classes are lower for girls than boys. In 2002, the combined gross enrollment for primary, secondary and tertiary schools for females was 57% compared to 71% for males, (Ogunjuyigbe,2007).

This translates into fewer women in certain economic fields. The percentages of female workers in some selected professions in 2012 were as follow: architects, 2.4%, quantity surveyors, 3.5%, lawyers/jurists, 25.4%, lecturers, 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists,

FIGURE 3



Source: National bureau of Statistics 2020.

Discussion

23% of girls in Abia state are out of school (UNICEF, 2020).15% of girls in Abia State are married before age 18 (UNICEF 2020), 12% of girls aged 15-19 are already married or in union NBS,2020.

It is also important to note that more men participate in the labor market than women. Unemployment and underemployment rates are higher among women than men.

Gender disparity is also visible in the education of children with disabilities, a study in the 1990s revealed that only 37% of disabled females are literate compared to

57% for males. The reason for this situation is the cultural notion that the male will carry the family name while the female will marry. Also, the option of street begging by young disabled girls in order to earn income can inhibit their attendance of classes.

Girl-Child Education and Sustainable Development

The sustainability and progress of all regions depend on the success of women across the globe. (UNICEF, 2019) As President Obama said while addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 2012, "The future must not belong to those who bully women. It must be shaped by girls who go to school and those who stand for a world where our daughters can live their dreams just like our sons. "In Abia State, 23.4% of girls aged 15-19 are out of school, compared to 15.6% of boys in the same age group." (Source: UNICEF, 2020).Only 45.6% of girls in Abia State complete secondary school, compared to 62.1% of boys." (Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Very unfortunately, the Nigerian society fails to recognize that sexual abuse, amongst others, is not the only violation of the rights of the girl child under the Child's Right Act. The society is veiled to the provisions of Section 11 of the Childs Right Act, 2003.

Girl- child education has been identified as the backbone of the advanced societies of the world. Girl-child education has impact in the Nigerian society and any other society for that matter. Education is vital to the attainment of sustainable Development Goal 5 While two of the goals pertain directly to education; education also helps to reduce poverty and enhance environmental awareness.

The Role of Language educators

Effective teachers can make a significant difference in a girl's educational journey and value development Hansen (2019). A language educator needs to impact some vital knowledge on some basic /requisites on the pathway of becoming being a successful entrepreneur which includes the following:

The Importance of being Assertive

Teach girls to be more assertive, speak up for themselves and say no to what they think is not right. Women exhibit apprehension when fear is being singled out owing to their assertive behavior. But a recent study suggests that women who spoke up at work were perceived as better leaders.

Never to be Indecisive

Teach the girl-child the importance of taking big decisions and having the courage to stand by them. You can train them by encouraging them to make decisions about small things that affect them in the home and school setting. **It is not an Alternative to having a Family**

Do not let your girls think that being an entrepreneur means giving up on your family or staying single all their lives. Instead of feeding them with stereotypes about women and marriage, let them know that both entrepreneurship and marriage are matters of choice. They are not mutually exclusive and it is not impossible to run a successful business while also having a good family life. Tell them never to let anyone make them decide between having a career or a personal life. And, teach them never to settle for someone less smart than them and never to limit their own professional growth for the sake of 'finding the right one'.

Educators and Teachers

Teachers play a vital role in instilling tolerance as a value in education. Tolerance is the acceptance and appreciation of diversity, including differences in culture, religion, ethnicity, and individual perspectives. By promoting tolerance, teachers help create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

Ways teachers instill tolerance:

Empathy: Teachers help students develop empathy by discussing real-life scenarios, role-playing, and encouraging active listening. Fostering empathy and understanding of female experiences (Elias, 2018). Evidently, sharing stories and experiences of women and girls, it encourages students to listen and learn from others.

Encouraging respectful language and behavior): Model and encourage respectful language and behavior. Discuss the impact of hurtful language and behavior, (National Education Association, 2020). Teachers model and encourage respectful dialogue as well they teach students to engage in constructive debates and discussions. Further, they address, challenge stereotypes and biases, which helps to promote critical thinking and media literacy.

Creating a safe space: Teachers establish a safe and inclusive classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. They also use educational materials that reflect diversity and promote inclusivity.

Self-awareness: Developing emotional intelligence and self-reflection help students to understand their own emotions, strengths, and weaknesses, and develop self-awareness. It encourages journaling, meditation, or mindfulness practices. (Goleman, 1995).

Behavior Change Outcomes:

1. Challenging stereotypes and biases

Discussion of debunking common stereotypes and biases will encourage the girl child to question and challenge assumptions ((Smith, 2018). This will help to promote equality and challenge discriminatory behavior.

2. Encouraging respectful language and behavior.

This comes with practical example of standing out as Models in words and deeds in projecting respectful language and behavior (National Education Association, 2020) Furthermore, discuss the impact of hurtful language and behavior.

3.Fostering empathy and understanding of female experiences.

A teacher should endeavor to share stories at intervals: the experiences of women and girls (Elias, 2018) as well, encourage the students to listen and learn from others.

4. Supporting female empowerment and self-expression

The girl child must be encouraged to express herself confidently and authentically. (The Global Partnership for Education, 2020) Discussion on the importance of female empowerment and leadership

5. Addressing and preventing gender-based bullying and harassment.

It is expected that teachers should highlight the impact of bullying and harassment as well encourage the girl child to report incidents and support victims.

6. Encouraging healthy relationships and communication.

Healthy relationship dynamics and communication skills are vital tools as these will encourage the girl child to practice empathy and active listening.

7. Modeling positive masculinity and femininity

Evidently, as teachers teach and discuss traditional and non-traditional gender roles, they encourage students to challenge harmful gender stereotypes. (The World Bank, 2019).By promoting these values and behaviors, educators can create a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits and promotes gender tolerance.

Recommendations

Parents and Guardians

Parents are the first and most influential teachers in a child's life, and play a critical role in shaping their values and beliefs. Parental involvement in education is a key factor in determining a girl's academic success and value development.

Teachers create a supportive and inclusive environment that benefits the girl child in instilling ethics already nurtured at homes.

The government has a critical role in ensuring access to quality education for all, including girls. Government policies and programs can either promote or hinder gender equality and value education

Non-Governmental Agencies play important role like UNICEF, UNESCO etc. in inculcating core values such as zero tolerance, confidence and team spirit among in the girl child training and development.

Conclusion

In summary, value education promotes gender equality by challenging stereotypes, biases, fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect, and encouraging girls to pursue their dreams. Girl child training focus on developing essential ethics as surveyed in this paper as well life skills like communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking etc.

Girl Child education is crucial for national development, and the role of women cannot be underestimated. This is so because the education of every child produces mothers who are educated and who will in turn educate their children, care for their families and provide for their children. The family, teachers and the society are indispensable forces in the education and empowerment of women and girls. Thus, governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations should show commitment and eschew lack of stringency in the policy for motion, formulation, reformation and general implementation as well as evaluation.

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