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ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION: ADDRESSING CULTURAL BARRIERS AND RELIGIOUS MISCONCEPTIONS IN NIGERIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Acquisition of knowledge and its application is a fundamental necessity for all Muslims for them to be qualified as believers. Islam orders for acquisition and dissemination of knowledge among believers, irrespective of gender. The aim of education in Islam is to produce a decent human being who is capable of delivering his duties as a servant of Allah and His vicegerent on earth. This paper entitled: "Islamic perspectives on Girl-Child Education: Addressing Cultural Barriers and Religious Misconceptions in Nigerian Muslim Communities", aims to examine and analyze the perspective of Islam on Girl-Child education from its ultimate sources. The paper addresses the barriers between the teaching of Islam on Girl-Child education, culture and religious misconceptions in Nigerian community. The paper applied qualitative research methodology and recommended that Girl-Child should be proper educated in line with the Allah's instruction.

Keywords: Girl-child Education, Cultural Barrier, Religious Misconception, Muslim Community

Introduction

The educational development of a child is very important, because of the important role they play in the development of a country. Historically women have been subjected to social injustice and educational dispossession. The education of a girl has faced hardship because of the societal perceptions of a girl, thinking that the girl is to be trained and brought up to play her natural role as a wife, mother and servant to her husband and in-laws. Irabor (2019) stated that the idea that a woman has no other purpose than to marry and have children has brought a lot of disadvantages and consequently backwardness to society because when the mothers are illiterate they don't know the value of education, they are the kinds of parents that prefer to send their children hawking on the streets than to enroll them in schools. In Nigeria, female children are educationally disadvantaged due to the above assertions while boys are sent to school. The number of girls involved in street hawking and house help practices is higher as compared to boys in northern Nigeria. A girl child is raped, abused, and sent off to early marriage as if this was the only reason why Allah created her. These kinds of practices can never move the nation forward. Contrarily, Islam sees a girl with a different perception from that of Nigerian society. Islam is a religion of peace and equity it doesn't differentiate between boys and girls in terms of acquiring knowledge. In Islam, pursuing knowledge is a holy duty irrespective of gender. The significance of acquiring and broadcasting education has been highlighted constantly in the Qur'an and hadith, which are the decisive source of direction for Muslims. The Prophet (SAW) said: Convey from me even if it is a verse (Al-Bukhari, 1987).

Girls or women constitute half of the total population in almost every society; avoiding or treating them as less important is not supported in the Muslim society.

Concept of Girl-Child Education

Education is a fundamental human right. It is to be exercised by everyone regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, economic disparity, nationality or geographical differences and health barriers (Murtala & Nasiru, 2021). Education is a channel to human development. It is a channel through which knowledge; skills, character, values, and attitudes are acquired and transmitted to the next generation. Education exposes one to acquire knowledge about one's environment so as to know the causes of variations in a person or persons, or groups and also for sustainable development in a country (Eze, 2018). Within the context of the Nigerian environment, several definitions of the girl-child have been given by different scholars. Ada (2007) defines the girl-child as a person below 14 years of age. Chibiko (2009), and Juliem, (2018) viewed the girl-child

as 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).

Girl-child education simply refers to the process of educating girls of the above-mentioned age grade irrespective of race, religion, or cultural background. The education whether formal or Islamic education enables the girls to have the opportunities that directly or indirectly benefit them and their families in one way or the other to know their rights as human beings. Girls need an education that will help them not only to read and understand the world, and master the 3RS (reading, writing, and arithmetic), but be masters of their lives and makers of their own destinies. They need education that will help them acquire the necessary analytical skills to understand the fast-changing realities of life, which will give them the confidence and strength to refuse to submit to conditions of indignity and inhumanity. Women need an education that will not only help them in the search and acquisition of new skills and knowledge but also help them acquire and strengthen values like justice, equality, honesty, truthfulness, and solidarity.

Importance of Girl-Child Education

A Chinese proverb says: "if you educate a man, you educate one person. If you educate a woman you educate a nation". According to the World Bank report, "a country with more educated girls and women is not only healthier, but wealthier" (Grant, 1993). Girl's education has a way of improving their living standards in particular and national development, generally. According to UNICEF (2003), education is everybody's right. It means that no girl, no matter how poor her family or her country is, should be excluded from schooling. Educating girls is the best investment for societal development. The benefits of education to girls and the society at large include:

1. Educated girls develop essential life skills, such as: self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society, and protect themselves from HIV/AIDS infection and other related diseases, sexual exploitation and pressure for early marriage and childbirth.
2. Educated girls gain skills and competencies for employment which enable them to be economically productive members of the society.
3. Educated mothers are more likely sending their children to school, thus promoting continued and lifelong learning.
4. Educated women marry later and have fewer children which they can manage and afford their quality education and health.
5. Educated mothers nourish their children better, therefore became healthier and reduced child mortality (Abdulbaqi et al., 2025).
6. Educated women rarely die in childbirth because they know the benefits of anti-natal care which they do and also know the kind of food to eat during pregnancy and after delivery.

Islamic View on Girl-Child Education

Education in Islam is a divine command for all people, regardless of gender. The Quran and hadiths leave no doubt that women have the responsibility of seeking and increasing knowledge. The importance of knowledge is emphasized in the Holy Quran, and mentioning the word "ilm" and its different meanings invites people to think in different ways. In the holy Qur'an, Allah commands men and women to increase their knowledge and punish those who do not learn. The first revelation of our Prophet Muhammad (SAW) begins with the word "read" and says:

> Read in the name of your Lord Who create. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Majesty. Who taught by the pen: (He) taught the man what he did knew not (Q96: 1-5)

Therefore, the principle of the law is that when a commandment is revealed, it includes women even if the masculine gender is physically used. If this principle is not supported, commands such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms, which are the conditions of Islam, are not valid for women because they are given all in the

commandment of masculine gender. Girl-child education is a divine duty, as it was stated in the hadith of Ibn Majah, where the Prophet (SAW) said:

> Seeking knowledge is the duty of every Muslim male and female
> (Ibn Majah, 3/2691)

This hadith affirms that the education of girls in Islam is one of the fundamental right, comparable to other essential rights such as protection of life, property, religion, intellect, honor, and family. Girls' education holds profound importance within the Islamic framework, as it enhance their intellectual capacity, empowers them to utilize their skills effectively, broadens their perspective and enables them to become responsible and productive members of society. Moreover, education in this context extends beyond basic literacy skills such as reading and writing. It encompasses the comprehensive acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes across various disciplines. Such holistic education equips girls to make immediate, meaningful and sustained contributions to their social, environment, economic development and overall physical and mental well-being.

The Prophet (SAW) never opposed the education of girls because the first school in Islamic history was founded by him after the Battle of *Badr*. Seventy enemy soldiers were captured during the battle. These prisoners are literate people. Our Prophet declared that if every captive could teach ten children of Medina to be able to read and write, regardless of boy or girl, they would be saved and released.

The Role of Women in Advancing Education in Islamic History

Since the early days of Islam, educated women have attracted the attention of good and privileged citizens. The Prophet (SAW) was committed to educating women and girls and encouraged their wives and daughters to study and get educated. He organized courses for women who frequently attended public meetings to receive knowledge from the Prophet (SAW). The women in his family were educated not only in Islamic sciences but also in other fields such as medicine, poetry, and mathematics. He organized command training for women and met with them once a week. This is backed by a hadith Sahih Al-Bukhari number 101 narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Kudri:

> Some women requested the Prophet (SAW) to fix a day for them as the men were taking all of his time. On that he promised them one day for religious lessons and commandments……

In another hadith of the same Sahih Bukhari number 2547, where Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari reported that; the Prophet (SAW) said:

> He who has a slave-girl and teaches her good manners and improves her education and then manumits and marries her, will get double reward; and any slave who observes Allah's right and his master's right will get a double reward.

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) in 632, the guidance of his wives Hafsa, Ummu Habiba, Maymuna, Umm Salama, A'isha (RA) among others was instrumental to understanding and practicing the life of the Prophet and maintaining it in the historical memory of the Islamic community. Authoritative hadith collections, such as Sahih Bukhari, could not have been completed without the efforts and contributions of these women.

Women were founders and patrons of schools and other higher educational institutions. For example, the University of Al-Qarawayyin, the oldest continuing university in the world, was founded in 859 in Morocco by Fatima Al Fihri. The school was a famous center of learning, leading in sciences, philosophy, and Islamic studies, where Muslim and non-Muslim scholars such as Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, Jewish philosopher Maimonides, and Pope Sylvester II, who is said to have introduced Arabic numerals to Europe, studied.

Attitudes of Society toward Girl-child Education

Generally speaking, northern Nigerian girls do not have the opportunity to go to school early due to gender discrimination and cultural norms. They are pampered and kept at home to cook, marry, have children, run the house, and work for men. The National Report on Research and Policy on Higher Education in Nigeria indicates that educational inequality continues to favor men, while illiteracy among women remains significantly high. As

of 1990, only about 39.5% of the female population was literate, compared to 63.3% of men. The report further reveals that approximately 26.23% of one million women in Nigeria are illiterate. At all levels of education, the number of girls enrolled is consistently lower than that of boys. The lowest rates of female school attendance are found in regions where overall enrolment both for boys and girls is already low. This trend is evident across the country, but it is particularly pronounced in Norther Nigeria. In addition, primary school enrollment is more common in rural areas and in communities where formal education has only recently been introduced or expanded.

In the past, Nigerian women were treated as slaves by men. A few years ago, education in northern Nigeria was only for men due to the economically and politically male-dominated society (Ibrahim, 1999). When someone complains about only having a daughter, it is a sign of ignorance or indifference. Some men make the same mistake by pushing their wives away from marriage because they don't know God's gift and purpose. Some of them send their wives out of their houses simply because they give birth only to daughters and live a miserable life. Many parents can reap the rewards of neglecting or pushing their daughters away so that sons, who are seen as more important and valuable to the family, go to school. Ironically, most male heirs are often disappointed by their parents. The Population Manual (1999) explains that at least one in three girls worldwide will experience beating, sexual assault, or other forms of educational abuse in their lifetime. Abusers are often family members. Gender-based violence is considered a serious problem for human health and a violation of human rights. There is a perception in most Nigerian societies that girls' education has nothing to do with their world. It is also believed that no matter how educated a woman is, she will find herself in the kitchen, which is her workplace (Hall, 2008)

Problems of Girl-Child Education in Nigeria

Over the years, the role of women in Nigerian society has been perceived as childbearing and family management. For this reason, in most developed countries, men are directed to jobs in technical and scientific fields, while women are directed to work at home. In Nigeria, the relationships and activities of Nigerian men and women are governed by traditional culture and traditions, and men's love takes precedence over women's love. Women are in a subordinate position, especially at the society and family level, where boys are ahead of girls. Similarly, Alabi (2012) stated that some parents prefer certain subjects and that girls' attitudes towards mathematics are not good; teachers' behavior is not good for students, teaching method is not appropriate, government/society is not adequate. With the participation of girls in STM, it is possible to give importance to girls' education. The perception that girls' education is secondary to boys' education in some societies and some religious organizations can also affect women at all levels of education. Additionally, the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2003) states that poverty, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy; lack of education; culture and religion; gender bias in content and instruction; and poor teachers are some of the obstacles to girls' education

Other problems of girl-child education include access to education: This access to education is only about the right to education. It includes the opportunity, ease, and ability to receive education. It is true that many governments create policies for the education of their citizens, but most of these policies do not include the special characteristics of girls. In such cases, girls' access to education, which is an important human right, maybe denied (Chibiko, 2009). Research shows that despite intense efforts towards this goal, millions of girls are still out of school. Njoku (2008) stated that there are child labor, poverty and lack of money, pursuit of wealth, slavery, unemployment, family breakdown, child labor at home, and other things that affect girls' education. Retention and Release UNICEF (2003) argue that girls' education can lead to greater cohesion, stronger families, better services, better child health, and participation in good governance. Despite the positive impact of education on the country's development, research results show that girls drop out of school more often than boys

Conclusion

History of Girl-child education in Nigeria, concept of girl-child education, importance of girl-child education, Islamic views on girl-child education, societal attitudes towards girl-child education, problems of girl-child education in Nigeria, and review of empirical studies. It can be seen from the areas discussed in this paper that girl child education has many and different influences that hinder its effectiveness in Nigeria. All of the literature reviewed above revealed different challenges faced by girl child education but none of them related it with the fault of any religious influence.

Recommendation

The paper recommends the following:

1. Re-education of Religious and Community leaders: Workshops and Seminars should be conducted for Imams, Scholars and Traditional leaders on the authentic Islamic teachings regarding female education. Imams should be encouraged to use *Juma'a* sermons and community gatherings to advocate for girl-child education.
2. Clarification of Religious misconceptions: literature should Developed and distributed, audio-visual and radio programs should be presented in local languages to clarify Quran and Hadith based support for girls' education.
3. Integration of Islamic and Western Education: Promotion of *Islamiyyah* schools that combine secular subjects with Islamic knowledge, making parents more comfortable with the idea of sending their daughters to school. *Islamiyyat* should be encouraged to include literacy, numeracy and vocational skills for girls.
4. Community sensitization: Run community outreach programs focusing on long term benefits of educating girls-health, economy, family life and religious development
5. Policy advocacy and Government Collaboration: Work with state and local Governments to ensure policies and funding that support girl-child education, particularly in Muslim-dominated areas.

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