# INNOVATIVE EDUCATION AND THE GIRL-CHILD: PANACEA FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines issues relating to the girl-child in Nigeria. Education is the medium through which the culture of the society is preserved, transmitted and improved. It is essential for the development and survival of any nation and the role of the woman can not be denied. In the past, educating the girl-child was seen as a waste of resources, since it was believed that her place is in kitchen. However, the narrative is changing. We are in a dynamic world; hence, the importance of innovation in order to adapt to changing times. Educational innovations help to address the present and future needs of the younger generation and boost equity in the access to education, as well as equality in learning outcomes. Innovative education is more than just the application of technology in the teaching and learning process, it involves using technology to transform learners to be change agents. In order for Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved, this paper recommends that early and forced child marriage should be banned with penalty; since it is believed that reduction of child marriage will be a game changer. Also, government should provide adequate learning resources that will help transform the traditional classroom into an innovative one.*

**Keywords:** Innovative, Education, Girl-Child, Achievement, Sustainable Development Goals

## Introduction

The educational system has experienced a tremendous change in the last decade; hence, it is rightly said that we are in an ever-changing and dynamic world. The world is not static as it evolves with the tides and it is hoped that humans advance with it for sustenance. In Nigeria, children are exposed to toxic traditional customs and philosophies. However, these practices have more effect on the girl-child as compared to the boy-child. In the past, the education of the girl-child was seen as a total waste of resources. Contrarily, the boy-child had better advantage and was given preferential treatment; as they are seen as those who will preserve the family legacy. While growing up, the girl-child is made to believe that her place is in the kitchen and to procreate. Literally, she was seen as a baby-making machine and a cook. Fortunately, times are changing and so is the narrative of the girl-child being a second class citizen and inferior gender. Families with girl-children are providing equal educational opportunities so they can make a life for themselves in the future. This shows the importance of having educated female population. However, the northern part of the country still lags behind. Related issues and concerns gave rise to different development goals amongst which include Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goals were borne out of the need to address crucial global concerns. SDGs were preceded by MDGs which unfortunately were not achieved as at when due (2015). SDGs are goals if realized will make living worthwhile and Nigeria (world at large) a better and safe place. It is important that the girl-child is given the opportunity to quality education which will prove useful to

her and the nation. Beyond the importance of education as a vital element of modernisation and progress; innovation can enhance the quality of education by enriching the learning process. With no exception to education, human activities require innovation to remain sustainable. Innovation could help boost equity in the access to education, as well as equality in learning outcomes. With innovation, education remains relevant, despite the rapid societal changes. Education is often plagued with the issue of productivity and it is believed that the system is slow to innovate. The days of black and white chalkboard must have been gone, but the role of students is just information consumers. It is expected that with current and on-going innovations in education, there should be paradigm shift of the role of learners from information consumers to problem-solvers and pacesetters. It hoped that innovative education will be able to rectify some of these educational issues as regard the girl-child and improves the quality of teaching and learning.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper is guided by 2 theories. Ecological Systems Theory propounded by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1974 and Theory of Cognitive Development by Jean Piaget in 1936. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, the development of the child is subject to a complex system of relationships which is affected by multiple levels of surrounding environment from the home (family) and school to the larger society which involves customs and laws. The scholar looked beyond the individual development, taking cognizance of ecology of development; and divided the child's environment into five different systems namely the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem. The microsystem is the immediate environment of the child which comprises the family and school; it is the most influential level of the ecological systems (Guy-Evans, 2020). The mesosystem is the interaction between the child's microsystems, for instance the interface between parents and teachers. Thus, it is a system of microsystems. It is assumed that cordial relationship between the child's parents and teachers will positively influence the child's development. The exosystem comprises social structures that do not have direct connection with the child but impinge on one of the microsystem which indirectly affects the child. These include mass media, neighbourhood and school board amongst others. The macrosystem encompasses cultural elements (socioeconomic status, ethnicity) that influence the development of the child. The chronosystem encompasses the environment changes that the child was exposed to over time. These systems are however interconnected and can either positively or negatively influence the child.

The theory of cognitive development proposed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget in 1936 is also relevant to this study. It focuses on the nature and development of human intelligence. It centres on children, from birth through adolescence. The scholar suggests that children build their own knowledge based on their experiences and are also motivated to learn by nature (Gill, 2018). The theory identifies four stages namely sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage, concrete operational stage and formal operational stage. Sensorimotor stage covers birth to 24months, with the goal of establishing an understanding of object permanence. Preoperational stage covers children between the ages of 2 to 7, attaching meaning to objects with language (symbolic thought) characterise this stage. Concrete operational stage deals with children between the ages of 7 to 11, solving problems out inside their heads (operational thought) characterise this stage. Formal operational stage includes 11 to 18years old, with the goal of using symbols to understand abstract concepts. The scholar assumed that an individual develops intellectually. However, with arrival at the fourth stage, previous knowledge cannot be changed rather can be built upon. The theory indicates the different ways of thinking at every stage of development which must be considered when decisions relating to the child arise. It also suggests the

teacher's role as a facilitator which will guide the child to explore, resulting in new discoveries and knowledge. It is therefore necessary to note that the different stages require unique approach to teaching and learning, and age-appropriate innovation where necessary.

**Education**

Education is seen as a medium through which the culture of the society is preserved, passed on and improved. It is important in all spheres of life. Education is also seen as the light that shows the way by removing the darkness of ignorance; the salt that gives the taste of life, the medicine that cures and the key which opens doors (Proshare, 2018). It is the greatest gift a parent or guardian can give to a child. Deductively, educating a child is more valuable than bequeathing a trillion naira or hundreds of oil wells as he or she needs knowledge, skills and expertise to effectively and efficiently manage them. Without the fore mentioned, sooner or later they will be in the past (once upon a time). Education breaks the shell of ignorance, which paves the way for self-discovery. It is a vaccine that will act as resistance to early child marriage and other gender bias. It will inspire the girl-child to make better decisions and choices.

**Educational Innovation, Types and Importance**

Innovation is the process of innovating. The term dates back to 1540, from the Latin word 'innovare' which means 'to change or renew'. The word is synonymous with novelty, change, transformation, restructuring, revolution amongst others. It has to do with something new, which could be an idea, product, method, process and/or techniques. Government of New Zealand in Hudson (2014) states the purpose of innovation as improvement in efficiency, effectiveness or competitive advantage with the creation, development and execution of a new product, process or services. Simply put, it is the medium through which our way of life is sustained. Innovation alters existing phenomenon and births new ones. In same vein, O'Sullivan in Kovacs (2017) defines innovation as the means through which large or small, radical or incremental changes are made to products, processes and services which outcome is seen in the introduction of a something new for the organisation that benefits customers and also adds to the knowledge store of the organisation.

Innovation involves three core phases which include idea, implementation and result. The result is derived from the execution of the idea which leads to a change. Innovation can either be tangible (technology tools - smartphones, tablets) or intangible (methods, techniques). It can also be revolutionary or evolutionary; revolutionary innovation deals with thorough revamp and/or swapping old with new which eventually leads to a complete change, while evolutionary innovation led to steady but incremental progress (Osolind, 2012). According to Christensen and Overdorf (2000); Yu and Hang (2010), it can be either disruptive or sustaining (Serdyukov, 2017). Disruptive innovation drastically alters the system (educational reform), whereas sustaining innovation maintains the existing magnitudes of performance. Simply put, evolutionary innovation can be seen as sustaining and revolutionary innovation as disruptive. It is important to note that the impact of innovation is linked to the innovation type.

In education, innovation can be a new pedagogic theory, methodological approach, teaching technique, instructional tool, learning process and/or institutional structure (Serdyukov, 2017). It can upgrade, modify and/or transform the system. It is envisioned to raise productivity, efficiency and quality of learning. Innovation is not restricted to educational administrators and teachers only but to all other stakeholders which include policy makers, parents and of course students. Educational innovations help to address the present and future needs of the younger generation. It also helps to achieve greater

excellence and equity of educational outcome. It is worthy to note that educational innovation can be foreign (from educational system outside) or local (from within the system).

**Overview of Sustainable Development Goals**

In contrast to Millennium Development Goals that were intended for action in developing countries, Sustainable Development Goals are universal and thus applies to all countries. SDGs as universal agreement are set of objectives aimed at eradicating poverty, protecting humans and the planet. SDGs are 17 in number and supported by 169 targets which are fused and indivisible; came into effect January 1st, 2016 and ought to be referenced for 15years which implies that they should be achieved before or by the year 2030. They serve as plan through which improved and sustainable future for all will be attained. SDGs include the following:

**Goal 1:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere
**Goal 2:** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture
**Goal 3:** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
**Goal 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all
**Goal 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
**Goal 6:** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
**Goal 7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
**Goal 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
**Goal 9:** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
**Goal 10:** Reduce inequality within and among countries
**Goal 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
**Goal 12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
**Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
**Goal 14:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
**Goal 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reserve land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
**Goal 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
**Goal 17:** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global p**artnership for sustainable development**

It is an undeniable fact that education is important for the development and survival of any nation, and the role of the woman is indisputable. As a result, it is believed that empowerment of girls and women (vis-a-vis elimination of gender inequality) will make a significant contribution to the progress of all goals and targets.

**Marginalisation of the Girl-Child in Nigeria**

The girl-child is a young female human who is not yet an adult (from birth to the age of 18). In educational context, this phase includes pre-nursery, nursery, primary and secondary which are infancy, childhood and early-late adolescence developmental stages. During the early years of life,

children are under the care of their parents or guardians and other adults. In most Nigerian homes, girl-children were made to bear the heavy burden of farm work and also carry out majority of the house chores alongside their mothers. The discrimination of the girl-child is seen in not only the denial of educational opportunities, but also nutrition, health, selective abortion of female foetuses amongst others. In the past, education of the girl-child was considered less important as opposed to her male counterpart; consequently, girl-children were not only marginalized but under-represented.

The Child Rights Act of 2003 stipulates that the national legal minimum age of marriage is 18. It is believed at that age the child has gotten the basic education that will make her independent to a certain degree. However, girl-children were married off at tender age when they can barely take care of themselves, but they are given the responsibility to manage a home. What will be the outcome of such home? There were also instances where the girl-child was used to offset family's debt. What kind of life will such a child be exposed to, when her rights have been violated? Save the Children (n.d.), affirms that the rate of child marriage in Nigeria is high; adds that 39% of girl-children are married off before the age of 18. The health-related complications of early and forced marriage of the girl-child often results in the disorder termed Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF) or Recto-Vaginal Fistula (RVF). The affected girl-children and young women are often neglected by their husbands and neighbours due to the unpleasant smell, hereby exposing her to a life of suffering and misery. It is believed that if girl-children are continually denied their full human rights and opportunities, then sustainable development is far from being achievable.

**Education and the Girl-Child**

Education is the right of every child irrespective of gender. Girl-child education involves the process of passing on relevant skills, knowledge and attitude in a bid to empower her for the future. The education of a child starts from the family (first and most important agent of socialization) and the mother amongst other family members acts as the first teacher. The purpose of girl-child education is to trigger her socio-economic potentials so she can support the nation's development. An educated girl-child grows into an educated woman who is capable of preserving and transmitting the culture, values, norms, and ethics of the society to her offspring and the chain continues. The result is a more literate population, better economy, reliable health care amongst others vis-a-vis attainment of SDGs. This is affirmed by Agabi (2008) who opines that, the more knowledge a woman acquires the better for the peace and progress of her society.

It has been said that today's educated girl-child is tomorrow's educated woman; she is enlightened and can make better life choices for her children. She knows the importance of education and will encourage her children to be educated; making sure none is left behind. Regardless of the importance of educating the girl-child, it is observed that girls still lag behind. A report by United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organization in British Council (2014) states that 5.5million girls are out-of-school, despite the importance of educating the girl-child which not only contributes to the stability of the nation but ensure that she is prosperous with empowered and productive subjects. Nigeria has a literacy rate of 62.02% with male literacy rate at 71.26% and female at 52.66% and gender difference of 18.6% (USAID, n.d.). This shows that indeed gender disparities still exist.

In view of Education for All **and** Millennium Development Goals, it is obvious that the problem of gender equality had been a global concern and it is evident that the generalization of education is a long-term solution. EFA had 6 goals with the 5$^{th}$ goal which was to **e**liminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a

focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; in like manner, MDGs had 8 goals with the 3rd goal which was to promote gender equality and empower women. Unfortunately, the goal was not attained then, but all hope is not lost as it is also one of the 17 SDGs which is hoped to be achieved on or before the year 2030.

To ensure that the gender equality is achieved, the school must be in close proximity to the learners, secure, free from discrimination and harassment, provide equal opportunities to both gender and basic facilities must be available (water and sanitation - separate toilet facilities for girls). Education as a fundamental human right should be made accessible to all, regardless of gender, age, socio-economic status, religion, race or nationality. In addition to equal access to quality education, the girl-child must be given equal employment opportunities, economic resources, political participation and leadership, and decision making at all levels.

**Managing the Girl-Child through Innovative Education**

The constituent of the educational system is paramount to the development of the girl-child in terms of ability to meet her present and future needs. Educational system shapes today's learner to be tomorrow's leader, thus, it is imperative that we keep up with the continuous change by updating out-dated processes and presenting more enhanced approaches that will equip the girl-child to be purposeful. As, Agabi (2008) rightly states that today's girl-child is tomorrow's woman and the opportunity made available to her today will shape her into what she will become in the future - either as an asset or a liability to her society. Innovative education deals with using the knowledge of the basics for problem solving; thus, it is way beyond just knowing the basics. Also, it is more than just the application of technology in the teaching and learning process, it involves using technology to transform students to be agents of change. It deals with changing the norms in education, by encouraging teachers and students to discover and apply old and contemporary tools to arrive at a new destination. It boosts creative ability and critical thinking which is essential for self-reliance and productivity.

Innovative education can be considered from technological and/or methodological aspects. The issues of graduates (secondary schools and university) not able to live up to expectations, give rise to the question: what impact do traditional teaching methods have on learners? In traditional teaching methods, the teacher delivers educational information to the student; thereby, directing the instructional process. The teacher has high per cent talking time since it is subject-centred and learning tends to be passive. Contrary to these, innovative teaching methods focus on the learner, acknowledging the uniqueness of each and everyone (with different traits, abilities, interests and so on). It gives room for interactive learning, thus, changes the role of the teacher from information owner to facilitator. Team teaching (teachers working together to guide learners), case study teaching (exposes learners to open-ended problems) and problem-based learning (encourages learners to find solution to real-life issues) amongst others are the different instructional innovations that will drive the girl-child to be empowered.

For the avoidance of an out-dated and inadequate educational system, Fullan and Langworthy in Kovacs (2017), lend credence to innovative education stating that it is "the new model of learning partnerships between and among students and teachers, aiming towards deep learning goals and enabled by pervasive digital access" p.58. Modern technologies present productive ground for learning and teaching. This is affirmed by European Commission in Kovacs (2017, p.55), which states that "technology offers unprecedented opportunities to improve quality, access and equity in education and

training". It makes learning exciting for learners and encourages student engagement. These include instructional aids, online courses/classes, social networking tools, 3D printing and educational software and so on.

It is important that the girl-child is equipped with necessary skills for future endeavours; this can be achieved by the curriculum she is exposed to. Curriculum is the learning experiences planned for learners under the auspices of the school. It is an expression of all knowledge, skills and attitudes which a nation through her schools, imparts to her citizens (Amadioha, 2016). It should reflect the values of the learner's environment, and accommodate and support the needs of the learners. However, the institutions of learning should make certain that the curriculum is relevant and in line with best practices. It is worthy to note that curriculum innovation inspires teachers to think outside the box, challenge norms in order to accommodate the different types of learners. Consequently, the girl-child will be able to develop creative, innovative and problem solving skills which will be beneficial at present and in the future.

## Conclusion

Time has come for the government to organise series of awareness campaigns in order to put a halt on the marginalisation of the girl-child, especially where she is restrained with the belief that her role centres on giving birth and cooking. A girl-child can equally do what the boy-child can do and even much more. She can maintain a job and family, and exceptionally shoulders both responsibilities. It is also time to appraise the educational policy and fully accommodate the needs of the girl-child in our ever-changing world. Innovative education requires committed teachers who are open to change and develop skills needed for imparting learners.

## Recommendations

In order for Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved, it is recommended that:

i. Early and forced child marriage should be banned with penalty; since it is believed that reduction of child marriage will be a game changer.
ii. Teachers should be sensitive to gender rights and ensure that the classroom is learner-centred.
iii. Government should provide adequate learning resources that will help transform the traditional classroom into an innovative one.
iv. Teachers should be trained on the ways to utilise modern technologies during classroom instruction.

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