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November 2020

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Oboh, Opeyemi R. Mrs, "Empowering the Girl-Child Through Digital Media Literacy: The Role of Academic Libraries" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4496.

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EMPOWERING THE GIRL-CHILD THROUGH DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY: THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC LIBRARIES.

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Abstract

The girl child in times past has suffered marginalization due to the patriarchal sentiment that is pervasive in the society most especially in the developing countries. However, a ray of hope has shone on them as more voices of advocacy have risen to defend and project the value of a girl child towards societal development and the need to empower this class of gender for sustainable development. Technology is a great enabler for the empowerment of the girl-child, however, there are still traces of inadequate of opportunities, skills and the fear of discrimination which serve as stumbling block to the use of digital media and tools for information access and utilization. The paper looked into the marginalization of the girl child, the importance of empowering them and how the academic libraries through their myriads of services and resources can help make them digitally literate. The work relied solely on literature review through document analysis to meet for the research objectives. The general objective of the study is to see how academic libraries can empower the girl-child through digital media literacy skill. It was found out that intervention initiative to help empower the girl child is widely done by Non-Governmental Organisation. Gleaning from the review of literature, not so much has been done by academic libraries towards the achievement of the goal five of the Social Development Goals (SDGs)- gender equality. Thus, the study recommended that academic libraries should collaborate with other development agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for all gender empowerment initiatives, particularly ICT training programs.

1. Introduction

Development is considered to be an improvement in the lives of people, place and things. It is a process that people all over the world desires for. A country with active population of both young men and women will experience rapid development, by implication, the demographic dividend and intellectual dividend whether male or female, of a nation are drivers to a nation's development. Unfortunately, there exist, an obvious marginalisation of the girl-child globally but most specifically in developing countries. Girl-child discrimination has been expressed in myriads of ways. They are rated lower than men, they are to be seen and not heard. For instance, even till date, in Igbo-land, a woman cannot talk in the council of elders even when the matter is life – threatening. She cannot be a member of the council because she is a woman and can only express a view through her husband, a brother-in-law, or a son who has come of age (Iwuchukwu, 2013). They have long been discriminated against by the family and society as a whole. They have been consciously or unconsciously groomed to have a lower self-perception of who they are and what they can achieve, and that they are inferior to their male counterpart.

United Nations have conducted so many studies, the result of which has continually shown a pattern of traditional beliefs and practices where the boy child is still viewed as better or more capable than the girl child. The studies reported some harmful traditional believes like female genital mutilation, inaccessibility to education, son preference, forced marriages among others. All these inhumane practices have dealt enormously with their self-esteem and ability to succeed (Riya, 2017).

The girl-child in this context of use will refer to female whether girls, ladies or women who are within the service reach of academic libraries. Girls are an important resource for societal and global development, but according to United Nations (20..) those living in developing countries do not reach their full potential because they do not receive a proper education. According statement made by Ascencios (n.d.), “educating and empowering the girl-child is a surefire way to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutritional status and health, reduce poverty, and wipe out HIV/AIDS and other diseases.”

Presently, girls are under-represented in school enrollment and attendance in developing countries. According to the statistics given by World Bank, as cited in United Nations Girls Initiative

(UNGEI, n.d.) “girl represent 48 percent of primary school enrollment and boys represent 52 percent. Even though this gender gap has decreased in the last few decades, girls still account for 55 percent of all out-of-school children—meaning that, on average, for every 100 boys out-of-school, there are 122 girls. In many developing countries, the disparity is even greater.”

There have been various intervention initiatives from different quotas, like governmental, Non-Governmental organisations, libraries among others to help address these harmful practices and put up measures to empower them. Empowerment refers to giving the means to emancipation, setting free, liberating and equipping one to be in control of one’s life journey. It is truism to state that empowerment begins from the mind before it is evident in the person’s live, thus, no empowerment can take place in a relatively dark mind, a mind that does not have access to quality information and skills needed to access and use them especially in this technology age. A platform that can ensure unhindered access to information and also help train in skill acquisition to use same is an academic library.

Academic libraries are attached to institutions of higher learning like polytechnics, colleges of education, and Universities, they serve not just as a repository of information resources but also has gateway to the world of information by making use of the Internet and web technologies. By observation, survival in this age will not on be possible by access to information alone, but also acquiring and honing digital media literacy skill that can help foster independent access to and use of information both for present and future purposes.

The term digital media literacy is increasingly being used to describe new competencies that equips individuals with the confidence and ability to effectively use digital devices and the Internet to find, assess, generate new information and communicate it to others (Zwimpfer, n.d.). He further explains that in order to achieve this, one has to have some understanding of digital technologies and possess some technical skills to use them. Training the girl-child to acquire digital media literacy skill is empowering them for lifelong learning and relevance.

In an IFLA publication, titled ‘Libraries and the Sustainable Development Goals: a story telling manual’, it was stated that libraries regardless of the type, offer a broad range of information products and services that promote the achievement of every of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was further opined that

‘from promoting literacy, to offering access to information, libraries are safe, welcoming spaces, at the heart of the communities. They come with indispensable support of a dedicated staff with deep understanding of local needs. They advance digital inclusion through access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Internet connectivity and skills. They promote innovation, creativity and access to the world’s knowledge for current and future generation.’

The particular interest of this paper focuses on the fifth SDGs which is to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Academic libraries can help achieve this by offering programmes for women and girls to have access to information about their rights. They provide ICT and literacy programmes, coding-clubs and entrepreneurship training. Generally, libraries provide a safe and serene environment for women to read or pursue learning, access the Internet and computers, undertake technology training or talk with other women (IFLA, 2018)

Gleaning from this expectation, the paper therefore looked into the situation obtainable in the Nigeria setting that is how academic libraries are actively empowering the girl-child with specific interest to ensuring digital media literacy of this category of library users.

2. Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to see how academic libraries can empower the girl-child through digital media literacy skill. While the specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the discrimination of the girl-child in Nigeria;
- ii. examine the intervention initiatives against girl-child discrimination in Nigeria;
- iii. explore the importance of digital media literacy in the digital era in Nigeria;
- iv. empowering the girl-child and its consequent effect on sustainable development and
- v. explore how academic libraries can help empower the girl-child to be digitally literate

3. Literature review

This section will treat each of the objectives of the study by reviewing literature and stating the stance of each of the incidences in the Nigerian environment.

3.1 Discrimination of the girl-child in Nigeria

Gender discrimination exists in most parts of the world today. It is a universally established truth that societies has always been inclined to discriminate against the girl child. It commences with the birth of a child, there is always much rejoicing when a male child is born because of the perennial importance attached to the sex (Nakpodia and Urien, 2012).

Statistics has shown that about half of the world's population is women who are ideally supposed to contribute half of the world's economic, social and political input but this is not the case as research has revealed otherwise. 'In Nigeria, it was revealed in a comprehensive report presented by The British Council Lagos on Gender in Nigeria 2012 that only 15% of Nigerian women have bank accounts, and yet, of the 162.5 million people in the country, 49% (80.2million) are girls and women' (Nwiro, 2012). More so, other research also gave credence to this fact, by confirming that many women live in ignorance, poverty and with little hope of getting to know what is happening in the outside world. (Oyelude and Bamigbola, 2012).

Asides unequal access to education, another shade of discrimination was stated by Beyond Access (2012) that between boys and girls, men and women, particularly developing countries and rural areas, girls and women are often restricted to traditional roles, and do not have equal access technology.

The girl-child discrimination is a global human right concern demanding legislation across the nations of the world. They are victims of various traditional and cultural practices, they suffer degradation, they are objects of poverty, their faces are only to be seen but their voices not to be heard, they are seen as being subservient to their male counterparts; they are the inferior set, their place is in the kitchen (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013). They are shackled with the patriarchal sentiment of the society.

3.2 Intervention initiatives against girl-child discrimination

The canker of gender inequality has been tackled with diverse initiatives. From the international front, some of such intervention initiatives are stated below as listed by Beyond Access (2012):

- The annual International Girls in ICT Day, launched in April 2011 by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), aims to encourage more girls and women to access technology and consider careers in the technology field.
- The ITU has initiated other programs including the Digital Literacy for Women & Girls joint program with Telecentre.org, Community ICT Centres for Women's Empowerment, and Girls in ICT, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).
- UNESCO has an entire strategy on gender equality that includes ensuring ICT access for girls and women, and training to help girls and women enter technology professions.
- The United States State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also have initiatives, such as TechWomen, geared towards inspiring women to pursue careers and leadership positions in technology.

In African, governments have demonstrated their commitment to continue, expand and accelerate efforts to promote gender equality and girl-child empowerment at all levels. Several declarations and charters, and gender-friendly legislation were enacted to champion the course to gender equality and girl-child empowerment. For example, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa in 2003 and 2004 (Kabeer, 2016; Razavi, 2016 in Atuase, 2018).

Although African countries have adopted a number of universal declarations and commitments but Economic Commission for Africa (2005) opined that just a few of them have been much done in translating those declarations into national policies. Even they have been implemented, nevertheless African women are persistently marginalised in accessing information and information communication technologies (ICTs) due to problem of illiteracy, socio-cultural attitudes and lack of understanding of the resources and situational impediments experienced by women (African Development Forum, 2008). This is perhaps as a result of low access to productive information resources and wide gap between commitments and implementation (Economic Commission for Africa, 2005 in Oyelude, and Bamigbola, 2015).

The table below projects some of the girl-child and women empowerment initiative that has been embarked on in Nigeria.

Table 1.1 Girl-child/Women empowerment initiatives in Nigeria

S/ N	EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE	DATE INITIATE D	INITIATOR	SUMMARY OF ACTIVITES
1	Global Youth Leadership and Girl-child Foundation (GYLGF)	2015	Dr. Adepeju Oti	To develop youth and the girl-child who are socially responsive, responsible and able to lead self
2	The Widow Support Initiative	1992	Professor Pat Utomi	Support women in abating poverty amongst other feminine specific challenges
2.	Women Empowerment Programme and Scheme Synergy (WEPPS)	2013	INTELS: an Oil and Gas company	To empower rural women through a twenty year period of training in fashion design and tailoring
3.	Women For Women International (WFWI)	2000		Helps Nigerian and southern African countries women to harness their skills in the field of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, knitting, petty trading, poultry and small medium enterprise.
4.	Sheleads Africa			It renders training to women to help them identify, to support and to find their business interest and ideas.

5.	Operation Hope			A small business empowerment scheme for women from low wealth neighbourhoods to help abate poverty in Nigeria.
6.	Unic Foundation			Trains young women in ICT fields, energy, catering, agribusiness, fashion, entertainment, emergency and security technology.
7.	Awesome Treasure Foundation		Pastor Jumoke Adenowo	Aid growth and development of women in Nigeria through purpose fulfillment and connecting them to one another.
8.	African Women Power Network			Women are trained in fields of agropreneur and has executed several projects for secondary school students.
9.	Nigerian Women Fund		Olufunke Baruwa	Seeks to solely increase the number of women in governance in Nigeria.
10.	WIMBIZ	2002	Different Individuals	Addresses the challenges the Nigerian woman encounters in her work place, business and organisations and in leadership.
11.	Well Being Foundation		Mrs Toyin Saraki	Focuses on equipping Nigerian women on maternal, new born and generally child health information to reduce child mortality rate and maternal mortality rate.
12.	Women Development International Association (WODIA)			Aims to improve the general well being of women by improved healthcare services, ensuring women access to soft

				loans and providing employment opportunity for sex workers.
12.	Girls Power Initiative	1993	Grace Osakwe and Bene Madunagu	Support the adolescent girl child in Nigeria by equipping her with skills, information and opportunities required to help them grow into fulfilled young women through research, education and action.
13.	WAAW Foundation	2007	Tolulope Owajoba Adeyemo	It aims at increasing the number of women entering into Science and Technology to ensure that they are beneficial to entrepreneurship in Africa.
14.	Moremi Initiative	2004		Invites womwn to take part in a twelve month course in programmes like training and education, mentoring, support, resource assistance and professional internship.
15.	Kudirat Abiola Initiative for Democracy	2006	Hafsat Abiola Costello	It collaborates on projects aimed at removing the barrier to women public participation and ending violence against women.

Source: Ogbar, L. (2018) <https://infoguidenigeria.com>

Despite some of the efforts in promoting gender equality and girl-child empowerment, available studies show incidences of maternal mortality, poverty, domestic violence, sexual harassment and child marriages, including many issues on women and children that are still not been tackled in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Thus, the need for collective efforts to be made to amicably resolve issues bothering on the girl-child and women empowerment. (Atuase, 2018).

3.3 Importance of digital media literacy in the digital era in Nigeria

The term digital media literacy (DL) is increasingly being used to describe new competencies that equips individuals with the confidence and ability to effectively use digital devices and the internet to find, assess, generate new information and communicate it to others (Zwimpfer, n.d.). He further explains that in order to achieve this, one has to have some understanding of digital technologies and possess some technical skills to use them. Khan and Waheed (2015) have defined digital media literacy as the ability to effectively perform tasks in the present digital information environment. They further indicate that when a person is able to interpret digital media like sound, images, text as well as generate new information from it, then that person is said to be digitally literate. Digital media literacy thus, is a combination of literacies. These include photo visual literacy (being able to rearrange digital content to create new meaning); branching/hypermedia literacy (ability to use non-linear information seeking strategies to create knowledge from independent pieces of information accessed in a non-orderly manner); information literacy (the practice of always questioning information) and socio-emotional literacy (Ng, 2012).

The main concepts that underlie digital media literacy skill include, ICT literacy, computer literacy, Internet literacy, and media literacy. Brown (2014) and Zwimpfer, (n.d) stated that digitally literate people have the capabilities to:

- access digital technologies, like computers other mobile devices and the internet;
- search the internet for information as well as verify the information sources;
- competently and efficiently use digital technologies for work;
- protect personal data while avoiding malicious websites;
- utilise technological communication channels such as emails, and social media to keep in touch with others;
- understand and use online marketing platforms, online banking and other transactions;
- purchase and install software on digital devices and are able to use online tutorials and help to teach themselves simple tasks;
- complete online forms, share photos and videos online; and
- understand copyright law.

The increasing rate of change in the development of new communications technologies is likely to continue and places a demand on people to engage actively in lifelong learning in order to use new tools and resources to accomplish ordinary personal, social, cultural, and civic activities. One

of such communication technologies is the digital media. Digital media create empowering opportunities for people to connect with others and share ideas, engage in dynamic new forms of formal and informal learning, express their creativity, and use digital media and technology tools to participate as citizens in a democracy (https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/57130_ch1.pdf). There is therefore a pungent need for the girl-child to be equipped with such a skill as digital media literacy skill.

Literature advocates that as more and more information is moving online, it is critical that girls and women have equal, safe and reliable access to computers and the Internet. Without access to technology and possessing the relevant skills to use it, girls and women will continually be excluded from myriads of opportunities for social and economic leadership. In a bid to intervene in the gender-based digital divide, many international organisations have established initiatives geared towards helping girls and women access technology and technology training (BeyondAccess, 2012). These initiatives, coupled with the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to promote gender equality and empower girls and women, have opened the dialogue regarding the importance of gender equality in technology and the required skills which consequently leads to girl-child empowerment and societal development.

3.4 Nexus between girl-child empowerment and societal development

Empowering the girl child appears to be an essential component of the development strategy which seeks to enable them to reduce their level of poverty, and bring about an improvement in their standard of living both for the present and future female child (Lawal, Omisade and Akeem, 2016). Globally, women have less economic opportunities to improve their lives. They are often restricted in terms of education, the ownership of wealth, monetary return for their work, financial opportunities, and opportunities to influence the decision making at the level of the family and the society (Mikkola, 2005).

Studies focusing on developing countries have found girls education or empowerment is particularly important for the welfare of the family and for future development. Many empirical studies conclude that increased schooling of the mother is associated with larger effects on child's health, schooling and adult productivity than increased schooling of the father. Interestingly, there

is evidence even in the developed world that it is specifically the mother's education that matters greatly for the children's performance later on in life (Mikkola 2005).

United Nations Women (2014) outlined three reasons why linking gender equality, empowerment and education should be linked to sustainable development. First, it is a moral and ethical imperative: achieving gender equality and girl-child/women empowerment and realising the human rights, dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women is a central requirement of a just and sustainable world. Second, it is critical to redress the disproportionate impact of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses on women and girls, which undermine the enjoyment of their human rights and their vital roles in sustaining their families and communities. Third, and most significantly, it is important to build up women's agency and capabilities to create better synergies between gender equality and sustainable development outcomes.

3.5 Academic libraries and their role in empowering the girl-child

Libraries are major partakers for all forms of development. Thus, value of libraries towards sustainable development reinforces and orients them to develop pragmatic means in their services delivery. Hafkin (2017) emphasis that access to information brings socio-economic and political benefits to girls and women at all levels. The proactive and distinctive roles of academic libraries towards human resource and national development position them as better crusaders to the course of gender equality issues.

Libraries as part of their roles provide access to information, conduct research, teach literacy skills, and provide information on health and family planning, support for small businesses, farm owners, and students. According to Strand (2017) these initiatives by the academic libraries have given women the opportunity to be self-sufficient in the care of their families. This observation confirms (Morrell, Jewkes & Lindegger, 2012) who study indicated that academic libraries in South Africa and Zimbabwe have demonstrated the value for women development in their communities by providing technological resources for information accessibility. In Ghana, libraries contribute to bridge the inequality gap in communities through information service delivery and skills training programmes and partner with NGOs and other gender advocacy institutions to promote

One of the established causes of discrimination against the girl child is poverty. Most parents in developing countries do not have enough to sponsor their children to higher institutions. Some at least do try to give them the basic primary school or secondary school education. The girl child due to limited financial resources is made to sacrifice her future for the male child to further his education. However, some get to attend higher institutions but without the requisite resources especially technological gadgets and the skills needed for a balanced school experience. Academic libraries can help ensure such girls have unrestricted access to the libraries' ICT resources. In addition, they can train them to be digitally literate.

Libraries contain a body of knowledge on diverse fields that provide people the notion of social inclusion and sense of development (Tise, 2009). This emphasizes that academic libraries are not only the powerhouses for authentic information that support teaching, learning and research processes in higher learning institutions, but offer access to research output, provide accessibility to developmental information resources, research, teach, train and support people to access and use information. Wagacha (2007) indicates libraries empower women to know their civil rights and realise their potentials.

Furthermore, one of the major functions of the academic library is carrying out orientation and information literacy programmes. By embarking on this activity, academic libraries are playing an important role of equipping the female users with information retrieval skills (seeking, evaluation, and use) through the use of modern information technology (Bawack, n.d.).

Academic libraries are pivotal to empowering the girl-child through digital media literacy as they provide Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, help users develop the capacity to effectively use it and preserve information for both present and future access.

4. Conclusion

The girl-child lives in a society that is highly patriarchal. She seems to be shackled with the fetters of discrimination against her sex which have denied her the ability to spread her wings and soar into heights of achievements. Several voices of advocacy both from international and national endeavours have risen to change her fate. Academic libraries, in the same manner are contributing their quota to better the fate of the girl child. However, not so much has been done by academic

libraries in Nigeria. A clarion call is therefore made for academic libraries in Nigeria to be more proactive and deliberate in efforts to empower the girl-child.

5. Recommendation

Based on the review of literature made to achieve the set objectives, the following recommendations are made.

Academic libraries should partner with policy makers, stakeholders, traditional leaders, gender advocacy groups and decision-makers to provide information, education and training through conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings, festivals and other events.

Academic libraries should collaborate with other development agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) for all gender empowerment initiatives, particularly ICT training programs.

Governments at all levels and parent institutions of academic libraries should ensure the libraries are equipped with quality technology, internet connections, and trained staff to help girls and women within their sphere of user community gain the requisite digital media literacy skill and gain the benefits associated with ICT usage.

Academic libraries may need to repackage library services to engage the girl-child more on digital media literacy training in order to enhance digital inclusion.

Lastly, academic libraries should explore and determine strategies to end inequalities and foster the girl-child empowerment. Information professionals, specifically in academic libraries must explore existing literature on women development to shed light on relevant ways to creatively expand traditional means to improve lives of women.

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