

Tracing the Historical Development of Nigeria's Legal and International Commitments to Bridging Gender Gaps in Girl Child Education

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Abstract

Education is a critical aspect of an individual's life as it serves as a pathway to success and a bright future. However, the girl child in Nigeria is at a significant disadvantage as a result of cultural practices and beliefs. These practices limit their access to educational opportunities and burden them with household chores. Moreover, they are sometimes married off at a young age, further interfering with their education, which they need to survive. This study explores the historical evolution of Nigeria's legal and international commitments to addressing gender disparities in girl child education. It examines key legislative frameworks, policies, and international treaties that have shaped Nigeria's efforts to ensure equal educational opportunities for girls. From colonial-era educational inequalities to post-independence legal reforms, the paper traces Nigeria's engagement with global conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, it assesses the impact of national policies, including the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the Child Rights Act, in promoting gender parity in education. Despite significant progress, challenges such as socio-cultural barriers, inadequate implementation, and funding constraints persist. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, increased political will, and community-driven initiatives to achieve sustainable progress in bridging the gender gap in education.

Keywords: Gender Disparity, Girl-Child Education, Historical Development of Girl-Child Education, Gender International Commitment, Legal Commitments on Girl-child Education.

Original Research Article

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Introduction

Nigeria's journey toward promoting gender equality in education has been marked by significant milestones and challenges. This analysis delves into the country's historical evolution of constitutional, statutory, and international obligations aimed at addressing gender disparity in knowledge acquisition among the girl-child.

Gender disparities in education have long been a critical issue in Nigeria, particularly in the context of the girl child's access to knowledge acquisition (Fatai et al. 2024). Historically, as posited by Obagboye & James (2024) societal norms, cultural

beliefs, economic barriers, and institutionalized gender biases have contributed to limiting educational opportunities for girls. However, over the years, Nigeria has made significant efforts to address these disparities through constitutional provisions, statutory reforms, and international commitments aimed at promoting gender equality in education.

The evolution of Nigeria's legal and policy framework regarding the education of the girl child can be traced back to colonial-era policies, post-independence constitutional developments, and contemporary legislative interventions (Anyanwu, 1999, Okeke, 2020 & Aja-Okorie, 2013). The 1999



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Constitution of Nigeria, as amended, explicitly guarantees the right to education and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. Additionally, statutory frameworks such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act and the Child Rights Act (CRA) reinforce the government's obligation to ensure equal educational opportunities for both boys and girls. Despite these legal advancements, enforcement challenges and socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder full gender parity in education.

On the international front, as elucidated by the Global Campaign for Education (2012) Nigeria has ratified several key treaties and conventions aimed at eliminating gender disparities in education. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality). These international commitments place a legal and moral obligation on Nigeria to implement policies that promote inclusive and equitable education for all children, particularly girls (Jaja, 2013, Amin & Christiana, 2017).

This paper explores the historical evolution of Nigeria's constitutional, statutory, and international obligations concerning gender disparities in the education of the girl child. It examines the progress made, the challenges encountered, and the prospects for achieving full gender equality in knowledge acquisition. By analyzing the interplay between legal frameworks, policy implementations, and societal attitudes, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's ongoing efforts to bridge the gender gap in education.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this study is to trace the historical evolution of Nigeria's legal and international commitments to bridging gender gaps in girl child education. Specifically, the study aims to: **Examine the historical development of educational policies** in Nigeria and their impact on gender equality in education. **Analyze Nigeria's legal framework** related to girl child education, including national laws and policies that promote

gender inclusivity. **Assess Nigeria's engagement with international conventions** such as the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** in advancing girl child education. **Identify challenges and barriers** that hinder the full implementation of these legal and international commitments. **Provide recommendations for strengthening policies and implementation** to achieve gender parity in education.

Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative research methodology**, utilizing **historical, legal, and policy analysis** to explore Nigeria's efforts in bridging gender gaps in girl child education. The research methodology consists of the following components. The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**, focusing on Nigeria's historical and legal commitment to addressing gender disparities in education. It integrates a **historical approach** to trace the evolution of education policies and a **legal analysis** to assess the effectiveness of national and international frameworks.

Girl-child Education

Girl-Child Education is a fundamental human right recognized by various international and national legal frameworks. It emphasizes the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to girls, ensuring they have access to quality education without discrimination. (Ossai & Nwalado 2011)

Legal Frameworks Supporting Girl-Child Education includes:

International Treaties and Conventions: such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): Article 26 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to education, and this includes girls. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): This treaty, ratified by many countries including Nigeria, emphasizes the right of every child to education and the elimination of gender disparities in education. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): This convention calls for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in education (Agusiobo, 2018).

National Laws and Policies: such as Child Rights Act 2003: In Nigeria, the Child Rights Act incorporates the principles of the CRC and ensures the right to education for all children, including girls. However, its implementation varies across states. Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act: This act aims to provide free, compulsory, and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age, with a focus on reducing gender disparities.

Despite these legal frameworks, several barriers hinder the realization of girl-child education. This include among others: Cultural Practices: Discriminatory cultural norms and practices, such as child marriage and gender bias, often prevent girls from accessing education. Economic Factors: Poverty and economic hardship can lead to girls being withdrawn from school to support their families through labor. Infrastructural Challenges: Lack of adequate school facilities, especially in rural areas, can limit girls' access to education (Ukamaka & Ndidiamaka, 2020).

The significance of girl child education: From the works of Maduka, Obinna & Maduka, (2023), Anyanwu, (1999) & Nwankwo & Chinyere, (2025), the significance of Girl Child Education can be summarized as follows:

Girl child Education Reduces Illiteracy: Illiteracy is one of the biggest causes of poverty. No doubt education is a lifter for girls, orphans, disabled people, rural families and those who are more vulnerable in the society. By providing them education, they become relevant to themselves, their communities and the nation with its growth. Education improves the girl child, causing her to be productive and not a burden to the society. Educated women can raise their voices to be heard specially to demand for equality and fairness on issues that concern them and their families. Having a voice that could be heard leads to reduction in the rate of domestic and sexual violence.

Education ensures economic growth: Productivity leads to higher income and improved economic performance. Education contributes greatly to improve a nation's productivity. Education increases income for wage earners and productivity for employers thereby increases the benefits for the community and nation as a whole. An educated girl child will grow to become a very productive woman contributing her quota in the development of the nation.

Girl child education promotes economic competitiveness: One of the pillars of the knowledge-based economy is an educated and skilled workforce. Technical innovations and the competitive use of knowledge increases comparative advantage among nations. Educated women have occupied highly sensitive economic, political, social and academic positions nationally and internationally.

Girl child education raises productivity and earnings: Schooling increases the income for both men and women by a worldwide average of about 10 percent. The higher her educational qualification, the more likely her economic earning

It reduces poverty: Education is vital to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. While two of the goals pertain directly to education, education also helps to reduce poverty, enhance environmental awareness, and does more. Education lowers illiteracy rate which can give room for more women to be able to contribute financially to their families thereby making their families more capable of also securing education for their children. This also leads to lower poverty rate.

It contributes to democratization: When there is smaller education gap between boys and girls of schooling age the nation is most likely to enjoy greater democracy eventually. It would also increase women's involvement in the political process as educated women can participate in politics and contribute to effective governance of the society.

Therefore, girl child education is vital for the progress and development of society. Goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria prioritize education and gender equality, recognizing

the importance of providing education to all members of society for the overall benefit. By continuing to promote education for girls, society can enjoy the benefits of increased productivity, economic growth, and improved quality of life.

Nigeria's Engagement with Global Conventions on Bridging Gender Gaps in Girl Child Education

Nigeria has been actively involved in several global conventions aimed at promoting gender equality, particularly in education. Among the most significant international frameworks that Nigeria has engaged with are the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. These commitments reflect Nigeria's recognition of the need to eliminate gender-based disparities in education and improve access to quality learning opportunities for girls. Below is a detailed explanation of Nigeria's engagement with these conventions drawing from the positions of African Journal of Law, (2024), DRPC, (2017) & Aja-Okorie, (2013):

Nigeria and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** is a landmark international treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It serves as an international bill of rights for women, obligating signatory countries to eliminate discrimination in various sectors, including education. Nigeria ratified CEDAW in **1985**, demonstrating its commitment to gender equality. However, the country has yet to domesticate it into national law, which limits its enforceability at the domestic level.

Key CEDAW Provisions on Girl Child Education: CEDAW emphasizes the importance of equal opportunities for girls in education through several provisions: **Article 10:** Calls for the elimination of gender-based discrimination in education, ensuring equal access to curricula, scholarships, and career guidance. **Article 2:** Urges state parties to take measures to eliminate discrimination through legal

reforms. **Article 5:** Advocates for the modification of social and cultural patterns that reinforce gender inequality.

Nigeria's Efforts to Implement CEDAW in Education: Nigeria has taken several steps to align its educational policies with CEDAW's provisions: **Adoption of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004)** – This policy mandates free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education, particularly benefiting girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. **Establishment of the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education (2006)** – Aims to bridge gender gaps and promote female enrollment. **Child Rights Act (2003)** – Incorporates principles of non-discrimination in education and protects girls from child marriage, which is a barrier to education.

Challenges in Implementing CEDAW Commitments: Despite these policies, Nigeria faces several challenges in fully implementing CEDAW's provisions: **Lack of Domestication:** Since Nigeria has not incorporated CEDAW into national law, its provisions remain largely advisory. **Cultural and Religious Barriers:** Deep-seated patriarchal norms, particularly in Northern Nigeria, limit educational opportunities for girls. **Poor Policy Implementation:** Many gender-inclusive policies lack adequate enforcement due to weak institutional frameworks. **Security Challenges:** Insurgencies, such as Boko Haram's attacks on schools, disproportionately affect girls' education.

Nigeria and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, adopted in 2015 by the United Nations, outline a global framework for addressing poverty, inequality, and sustainability issues by 2030. **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** are particularly relevant to Nigeria's efforts to bridge gender gaps in education (FME, (2003), FGN, (2005-2007) & Dailypost Newspaper (2022).

Nigeria's Commitments to SDG 4 and SDG 5: Nigeria has integrated the SDGs into its national development agenda through several initiatives: **The National Policy on Education (2013, Revised in 2020)** – Aligns with SDG 4 by emphasizing inclusive

and equitable education for all. **The National Gender Policy (2006, Revised in 2021)** – Focuses on eliminating gender disparities in access to education and economic opportunities. **The Safe Schools Initiative (2014)** – Launched in response to attacks on schools, particularly affecting girls, by providing secure learning environments.

Progress in Achieving SDGs Related to Girl Child Education: Increase in Female Enrollment: Nigeria has witnessed improvements in primary school enrollment for girls, particularly in urban areas. Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs): **Programs like the** Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) provide financial incentives for families to send girls to school. **Efforts to Tackle Child Marriage:** Laws banning child marriage in some states help keep girls in school longer.

Challenges in Achieving the SDGs on Girl Child Education: Regional Disparities: Northern Nigeria continues to record lower literacy rates among girls due to cultural norms and economic constraints. **High Dropout Rates:** Despite increased enrollment, many girls drop out due to early marriage, economic hardship, or lack of menstrual hygiene facilities. **Funding Gaps:** Insufficient financing for education hampers progress toward achieving SDG 4. **Poor Data Collection:** Inadequate data makes it difficult to track progress and assess the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies.

Indeed, Nigeria's engagement with CEDAW and the SDGs reflects a strong commitment to eliminating gender disparities in education. While significant progress has been made through legal frameworks and policy initiatives, challenges such as weak enforcement, cultural resistance, and funding shortages persist. To fully realize the objectives of these global conventions, Nigeria must prioritize policy implementation, allocate sufficient resources, and foster community-driven efforts to support girl child education.

Theoretical Framework.

Radical Feminism Theory

Radical feminism as a movement was formed during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s

(Atkinson, 1969 in Nwankwo & Chinyere, 2025). At this point in time, women had won the right to vote and were working more outside of the home. In addition, the United States had gone through the sexual revolution which has lowered the pressure for people to be strictly monogamous and given them more room for sexual expression. In other words, life for women had greatly improved over the previous half century. However, women still experienced oppression on a regular basis. They felt satisfied working outside the home but would not be viewed as equal. They were being paid much less than a man that did the exact same job them.

Radical feminism opposes patriarchy, not men. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy is used to oppress women. They oppose existing political and social organization in general because most of them started from patriarchy. They support cultural change that undermines patriarchy. "Radical" meaning "going to the root" is used to describe this type of feminism because they believe that patriarchy is the root of the problem. Ukamaka & Ndidiamaka, (2020) submitted that radical feminism seeks to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, rather than through a purely political process. This includes challenging the notion of traditional gender roles.

Unlike other forms of feminism that viewed power as something positive as long as it was evenly distributed, radical feminists believed that power was mostly something experienced in a dualistic system of domination and subordination with one party always experiencing oppression. This system was an outrage to radical feminists, and as a result, they tended to be militant with their efforts, calling for direct action against patriarchy and male supremacy. They organized sit-ins and demonstrations at various events that they felt supported these systems and institutions of oppression.

Radical feminism has been criticized for its focus on patriarchy and its neglect of other forms of oppression, such as racism and classism. However, radical feminism has also been praised for its radical analysis of gender and its commitment to creating a more just and equal society for all. Accordingly, Radical feminism has had a significant impact on the

development of feminist theory and practice. It has helped to challenge traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, and it has inspired movements for social change around the world (Aganwu, 2017, Iloegbunam, 2016 & Osita-Oleribe, 2007).

Constitutional Provisions

Section 42 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, which includes gender-based disparities in education. Section 18 mandates the government to provide equal and affordable education for all citizens, including the girl child.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) includes provisions that promote gender equality and equal access to education for all citizens.

Section 42 – Prohibition of Discrimination: This section explicitly prohibits discrimination against any Nigerian on the grounds of ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion. The reference to sex means that the government and individuals cannot lawfully treat people differently or unfairly based on their gender. In the context of education, this provision ensures that girls and women should not be denied access to education based on their gender. Any law, policy, or practice that favors one gender over another in education is unconstitutional.

Section 18 – Government's Obligation to Provide Equal and Affordable Education: This section places an obligation on all levels of government (federal, state, and local) to ensure that education is made available to all citizens. The government is expected to: Provide free and affordable education at all levels. Promote equal educational opportunities without discrimination. Eradicate illiteracy through policies that encourage education for all, including the girl child.

Implications of These Provisions are that; **Legal Protection Against Gender-Based Disparities** – The Constitution makes it illegal to exclude or limit educational opportunities for girls and women. **Government Responsibility** – Authorities have a duty to ensure access to quality education for all citizens, regardless of gender.

Basis for Advocacy and Legal Action: If girls are denied education due to cultural, religious, or economic barriers, these constitutional provisions can be used to challenge such discrimination in court. **Support for Gender-Inclusive Policies** – Government programs and policies should be designed to bridge educational gaps between boys and girls.

Indeed, Sections 42 and 18 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria reinforce the principles of equality and non-discrimination in education. They serve as a legal foundation for policies promoting gender inclusion and ensuring that every child—especially girls—has the right to affordable and quality education.

Child Rights Act (2003) and Gender Rights

The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003, domesticated in some states, guarantees every child (male or female) the right to free, compulsory, and universal basic education. However, the implementation varies across states, leading to legal gaps in enforcing equal access to education.

The **Act** guarantees the right of every child, regardless of gender, to free, compulsory, and universal basic education in Nigeria. This means that both boys and girls are legally entitled to attend school without discrimination.

However, implementation varies because not all states have domesticated the Act, leading to legal gaps in enforcing equal educational access. In states where the CRA is not fully adopted or enforced, girls often face more barriers to education due to cultural, economic, or societal factors.

It should be noted that the **CRA (2003)** mandates free and compulsory education for all children. It protects both boys and girls from educational discrimination. Implementation challenges exist due to state-level variations in adoption. Girls are more affected by these gaps, limiting their access to education in some areas.

To fully achieve gender equality in education, all states must domesticate and effectively enforce the Act.

Challenges in Legal Implementation and Policy Enforcement in Ensuring Gender Equality in Education for the Girl Child in Nigeria

Despite the existence of constitutional provisions, international treaties, and national laws advocating for gender parity in education, implementation and enforcement remain major obstacles. These challenges arise due to socio-cultural, economic, political, and institutional barriers. Below is a detailed breakdown of these challenges:

Cultural and Religious Barriers: Some states, particularly in the North, have yet to fully implement the Child Rights Act, leading to a lack of enforcement of education rights for girls. Many families see investment in girls' education as unnecessary, believing their primary roles should be as wives and mothers.

Early Marriage and Legal Loopholes: The Nigerian Constitution allows states to determine the legal age of marriage, leading to child marriages that disproportionately affect girls' education.

Ineffectiveness of Sanctions: Laws prohibiting gender discrimination in education often lack enforcement mechanisms, allowing disparities to persist.

Patriarchal Societal Norms: Nigeria is a deeply patriarchal society, where traditional beliefs often prioritize male education over female education.

Religious Interpretations and Misconceptions: Some religious interpretations in Northern Nigeria have led to resistance against Western-style education for girls.

The misconception that Islam forbids female education contributes to lower enrollment and retention of girls in school. In contrast, Islam encourages knowledge for both genders, but enforcement of policies supporting this remains weak.

Child Marriage and its Legal Loopholes

Early marriage is a major barrier, with girls often being married off before completing basic education.

While the Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003 sets the legal marriage age at 18, the Nigerian Constitution (Section 29(4)(b)) allows for marriage based on "customary law," which some states use to justify child marriages.

In states where the CRA has not been domesticated, the lack of legal backing makes it difficult to enforce girls' right to education as a result of weak Legal Enforcement Mechanisms and the abysmal poor Implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act. The foregoing highlights how child marriage persists due to legal loopholes in Nigeria. The **Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003** sets the legal marriage age at **18**, but **Section 29(4)(b) of the Nigerian Constitution** allows marriage based on **customary law**, which some states use to justify child marriages. In states that haven't adopted the CRA, there is no strong legal backing to protect girls' rights, making it harder to enforce their **right to education**. Additionally, weak **legal enforcement mechanisms** and poor **implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act** further hinder efforts to prevent early marriage and ensure education for girls.

The UBE Act 2004 mandates free and compulsory education for all children up to junior secondary school.

However, enforcement is weak, and many state governments do not hold parents accountable for failing to send their daughters to school. There are no strict penalties or monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance.

Corruption and Mismanagement of Educational Funds: Funds allocated for girl-child education programs are often mismanaged or diverted. Government intervention programs, such as school feeding and conditional cash transfers, which could encourage girls' education, suffer from corruption and inefficiency.

Bureaucratic and Political Willpower Deficit: Some state governments deliberately refuse to implement policies promoting female education due to political and cultural sensitivities. Accordingly, lack of political will slows down the domestication of laws like the Child Rights Act in several states.

Security and Insecurity Challenges such as insurgency and terrorism: The activities of Boko Haram and other extremist groups have severely impacted female education, particularly in the North-East. Boko Haram's ideology opposes Western education for girls, leading to school abductions, attacks, and fear among parents such as the Chibok (2014) and Dapchi (2018) kidnappings, which discouraged school attendance among girls.

Banditry and Communal Clashes: In states like Zamfara, Kaduna, and Katsina, bandit attacks have made schools unsafe, forcing many to close. Girls are particularly vulnerable to kidnappings, sexual violence, and forced marriages, pushing parents to withdraw them from school (SaharaReporters, (2021).

Poor Law Enforcement Protection for Schools: The Safe Schools Initiative (2014) was designed to secure schools, but implementation has been poor. Many schools lack security personnel, proper fencing, and emergency response systems, making enforcement of education rights ineffective.

Socio-Economic Barriers and Poverty: Especially high cost of education and hidden fees. Although primary and junior secondary education are legally free, hidden costs such as: Uniforms, Books and learning materials, Examination fees, Transportation costs, Contributions for school maintenance among others discourage poor families from sending their daughters to school.

Opportunity Cost for Families: Families living in poverty often prioritize boys' education, believing girls will eventually marry and not contribute financially. Many girls engage in child labor (hawking, domestic work, farming) to support their families, which keeps them out of school.

Weak Judicial and Policy Framework for Gender Education Rights: Particularly, lack of Legal Precedents and Court Enforcement. Few court cases exist where girls or advocacy groups have successfully challenged educational discrimination in Nigeria. Many affected families lack awareness or financial resources to seek legal redress when their daughters are denied education.

Policy Inconsistency and Lack of Coordination: There are multiple education policies across different

government levels, leading to confusion and overlap. Some policies, such as gender-responsive education strategies, exist but are not enforced or monitored properly.

Inadequate Legal Sanctions for Violators: Parents, community leaders, or religious institutions that prevent girls from schooling often face no legal consequences. States that refuse to domesticate the Child Rights Act are not held accountable.

Constitutional and Legislative Reforms

Amendment of the 1999 Constitution (As Amended). Section 42 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex but lacks explicit provisions for gender-sensitive education policies.

Proposed Reform: Amend the Constitution to mandate equal educational opportunities for both genders as an enforceable right.

Section 29(4) (b) Loophole: This section allows for child marriage under customary and Islamic laws, which indirectly affects girls' education. Advocacy groups push for its repeal to ensure girls remain in school.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act 2004

This Act provides free and compulsory education up to Junior Secondary School (JSS3) but lacks strong enforcement mechanisms.

Proposed Reform: Introduce sanctions for non-compliance, including penalties for parents who refuse to send girls to school.

Strengthen state-level monitoring to ensure girls remain enrolled and complete their education.

Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003

The CRA mandates free and compulsory education for all children but has not been domesticated by all states, especially in Northern Nigeria.

Proposed Reform: Compel all states to domesticate and implement the CRA.

Introduce specialized courts or legal mechanisms to handle cases of educational discrimination against girls.

Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill

The GEO Bill, modeled after CEDAW, aims to eliminate gender discrimination, including in education.

Challenges: It has faced repeated rejections in the National Assembly due to cultural and religious opposition.

Proposed Reform: Increase public awareness and legislative lobbying to push for its passage.

Modify contentious sections to align with religious and cultural perspectives while maintaining gender equality principles.

Advocacy for Gender Parity in Education: Particularly the role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs such as:

Public Interest Litigation and Legal Advocacy: Organizations such as FIDA Nigeria (International Federation of Women Lawyers), Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC), and Malala Fund have initiated legal actions to enforce girls' right to education. These groups provide legal aid to girls denied access to education due to cultural or religious biases.

For example, these organizations have challenged early marriages in court, arguing that they violate the Child Rights Act and the Universal Basic Education Act (Dailypost Newspaper 2022).

Government-Led Advocacy and Policy Initiatives

Safe Schools Initiative (SSI): Launched in 2014 after the Chibok girls' abduction, the SSI aimed to protect schools from terrorist attacks and ensure safe learning for girls.

Challenges: The initiative suffered from fund mismanagement and poor implementation.

Proposed Reform: Increase funding and accountability to ensure proper implementation.

Deploy security personnel and surveillance systems to protect schools in conflict-prone areas.

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) for Girls' Education: The Federal Government and development partners like the World Bank and UNICEF provide financial incentives to encourage parents to send girls to school.

Challenges: Corruption and misallocation of funds hinder effectiveness. Some rural communities are not adequately covered.

Proposed Reform: Improve transparency in fund distribution. Expand CCT programs to more rural areas where gender disparities are highest.

School Feeding Programs: Programs like the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) have increased female school enrollment.

Proposed Reform: Expand coverage to underserved communities. Ensure sustained government funding to prevent program discontinuation.

Strengthening Enforcement Mechanisms for Gender Parity

Establishment of Special Monitoring and Enforcement Agencies: Sadly, Nigeria lacks a dedicated enforcement agency for gender education policies.

Proposed Reform: Create an Independent Commission for Gender and Education Rights to oversee policy implementation. This will achieve a number of remedies including:

Strengthening Legal remedies for violations: by creating Fast-Track Courts for Gender-Based education violations. These special courts should handle cases where girls are denied education due to cultural or religious biases.

Strict Sanctions against Schools and Parents: The reform is to introduce penalties for schools that deny admission to girls based on gender and enforce laws that hold parents accountable for refusing to educate their daughters.

Conversely, to achieve gender parity in education, Nigeria must adopt comprehensive legal reforms and strengthen advocacy efforts; such as amending

constitutional loopholes that allow child marriage; the enforcement of penalties for parents and institutions that deny education to girls; ensuring that government and NGOs collaborate to implement education policies effectively; by expanding financial incentives like the Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) and school feeding programs to keep girls in school and also creating an independent education monitoring agency to ensure legal compliance (FGN/UNICEF, 2023). Accordingly, we submit that by integrating legal frameworks and advocacy efforts, Nigeria can overcome gender disparities in education and promote a more equitable future for the girl child.

Case Studies and Real-World Examples of Legal Reforms and Advocacy for Gender Parity in Education in Nigeria

Case Study 1: The Child Rights Act (CRA) and its Implementation in Lagos vs. Zamfara States

The Child Rights Act (CRA) 2003 was enacted to ensure that every Nigerian child has access to free and compulsory education, among other rights. However, implementation varies across states, with some states fully adopting it and others resisting due to cultural and religious beliefs.

Lagos State Success Story: Lagos State domesticated the CRA in 2007 and actively enforced its provisions.

Policies Implemented: Free primary and junior secondary education for all children, including girls. There was strong government support for Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act implementation. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) with NGOs like Malala Fund provided scholarships for underprivileged girls. (Dailypost Newspaer, 2022)

Impact: Higher female enrollment in primary and secondary schools. Reduction in child labor and early marriages, as girls stayed in school longer. Importantly, there was Government commitment to monitoring and reporting violations.

Zamfara State – A challenge in implementation: Zamfara has not domesticated the CRA, citing cultural and religious concerns.

Challenges Faced: High rate of child marriages, limiting educational opportunities for girls. This is so because there was absence or low enforcement of the UBE Act, with many girls withdrawn from school for early marriages or domestic work. Indeed, there exist weak legal structures to protect girls' educational rights.

Impact: Low female literacy rates compared to other states. Girls who do enroll in school often drop out before completing primary education. NGOs like Save the Children struggle with advocacy due to strong resistance from local leaders. (Shaharareporters, 2021)

It is important to state that State-level commitment determines the success of education policies. Legal domestication and enforcement of laws like CRA are necessary for gender parity in education.

Case Study 2: Malala Fund's Advocacy for Girls' Education in Northern Nigeria

The Malala Fund, founded by Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai, has played a key role in advocating for policy reforms and grassroots initiatives to improve girls' education in Nigeria, especially in conflict-ridden areas.

Legal Advocacy: The Malala Fund supported the campaign to pass the Child Rights Act in Adamawa State (one of the states affected by Boko Haram insurgency) (Obagboye & James, 2024). Advocacy efforts pressured the federal and state governments to commit to gender-inclusive education policies through:

Community Sensitization: Partnered with local women's groups and religious leaders to challenge negative cultural norms. They conducted radio and TV campaigns to promote girls' education.

Scholarship and Funding Programs: It provided financial support for out-of-school girls to re-enter the education system. For success, they worked with local government authorities to ensure girls had access to school supplies, mentorship, and safe learning spaces.

Impact: Increased school enrollment of girls in Northern Nigeria, especially in Adamawa and Borno

States. Greater political commitment was responsible, with some states pledging higher budget allocations for education. Reduction in forced child marriages, as more girls stayed in school longer. (Saharareporters, 2021)

Thus, International advocacy organizations can influence local policy changes when they work with grassroots movements and government agencies.

Case Study 3: The Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) and the Chibok Girls Abduction

In April 2014, 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State, by the terrorist group Boko Haram. (The Nation Newspaper). The incident drew global attention to the security crisis facing female education in Nigeria. In response, the Nigerian government launched the Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) to protect students, especially girls, in conflict zones. (The Nation Newspaper)

Safe Schools Initiative (SSI) – Objectives and Implementation

Launched in 2014, SSI aimed to: Provide physical security for schools (fencing, security personnel, surveillance). Relocate students from high-risk areas to safer schools. Increase government funding for girls' education in conflict-prone states.

Challenges in Implementation

Funding Issues: Despite initial commitments, funds were mismanaged or insufficient. Many schools did not receive the promised security infrastructure.

Lack of Sustainability: The initiative slowed down after 2015, with little government follow-up.

Continued School Attacks: 2018 Dapchi Schoolgirls Kidnapping: More than 110 girls were kidnapped from a school in Yobe State, proving that security concerns remained unresolved. (The Nation Newspaper)

Impact: Some schools in urban areas received better security, but rural schools remained vulnerable. Increased public awareness led to more local and international pressure on the government. NGOs like

UNICEF stepped in, helping to fund girls' education in affected areas.

Accordingly, Legal reforms must be backed by strong implementation and accountability mechanisms. Security concerns must be addressed alongside education policies to ensure sustainable progress.

Case Study 4: Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) and Girls' School Retention in Kano and Katsina States

In Northern Nigeria, poverty remains a major barrier to girls' education (Nwankwo & Chinyere, 2025). The Federal Government and the World Bank launched a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program to support education.

How the Program Works: Families receive cash incentives if they: enroll their daughters in primary and secondary school; ensure consistent school attendance and receive additional incentives for girls who pass their exams and move to higher education levels.

Impact in Kano and Katsina States

Kano State: CCTs led to a 20% increase in female school enrollment. Families reported lower dropout rates, as they could afford school-related expenses (Nwankwo & Chinyere, 2025).

Katsina State: The program helped reduce child marriages, as families saw financial benefits in keeping their daughters in school (Nwankwo & Chinyere, 2025)

Challenges: Some areas faced delays in cash payments, causing frustration. Besides, corruption and misallocation of funds affected efficiency.

To this end, financial incentives can effectively increase female school retention, but must be properly managed to prevent corruption.

Lessons from Case Studies

State-level commitment matters – Success depends on political will and policy enforcement (e.g., Lagos vs. Zamfara).

International and local partnerships drive change – The Malala Fund and Safe Schools Initiative have shown the power of joint advocacy efforts.

Security issues must be addressed – Girls cannot access education if schools remain unsafe (e.g., Chibok and Dapchi kidnappings).

Financial incentives improve retention – Programs like Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) encourage families to keep girls in school.

Factors Responsible for Gender disparity in Education

In the summaries of UNICEF, (2023) & UNO, (2023), there are several factors responsible for gender inequality in education in Nigeria, including:

1. **Cultural Beliefs and Traditional Norms:** Cultural beliefs and traditional norms in Nigeria often favor male children over female children. Many families prioritize their sons' education over their daughters', believing that women's primary role is in the domestic sphere. This mindset perpetuates gender stereotypes and limits girls' access to education.

2. **Poverty and Economic Constraints:** Poverty and economic constraints also contribute to gender inequality in education in Nigeria. Girls' education is often viewed as a luxury that poor families cannot afford. Families may choose to prioritize their sons' education instead of their daughters' because they believe that their sons will be more economically productive in the future.

3. **Lack of Access to Schools:** Many girls in Nigeria do not have access to schools as schools are not located in some far-reaching communities and also transportation issues. This means that girls often have to travel long distances to get to school, which can be dangerous and impractical, leading to parents forbidding their children from proceeding to a school far from home.

4. **Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy:** In Nigeria, girls are often subjected to early marriage, which forces them to drop out of school and end their education. Teenage pregnancy is also a significant issue, which has forced several young girls out of

school. Due to the prevailing cultural beliefs and traditional norms, girls are often stigmatized when they become pregnant out of wedlock.

5. **Sexual Harassment and Abuse:** In Nigeria, girls and women often face sexual harassment, abuse, bullying, and intimidation in schools. Such traumatic experiences could lead to girls dropping out of school, or they may turn to sex work to support themselves, which results in lower levels of education.

It is imperative to note that, education is not merely a privilege but a fundamental right for all children, irrespective of their gender. It is imperative that every child, be they a boy or a girl, has equal access to education. This access should extend beyond mere attendance; it should ensure that the education provided is of high quality, enabling children to acquire knowledge, develop critical skills, and unearth their hidden potentials. This, in turn, equips them to play active and meaningful roles in their communities and society as a whole.

It is equally essential that the education provided to girls is coupled with an enabling environment that allows them to apply what they have learned. This practical application of knowledge can lead to transformative changes, not only in their own lives but in the lives of those around them.

Moreover, creating ample employment opportunities is vital. These opportunities should serve as a source of motivation for girls who are yet to receive an education. When girls see that their education can lead to meaningful work and economic independence, it becomes a compelling incentive to pursue learning.

Furthermore, it is crucial to dispel the gender biases that have historically defined roles in society, be it social, economic, political, academic, or developmental. These roles should not be restricted or determined by one's gender, either nationally or internationally. Instead, the girl child should be granted an equal platform to explore her potential and develop herself to the fullest extent of her abilities.

Essentially, the empowerment of the girl child through education is an investment for the betterment of society. It is a call to action to provide equal

educational opportunities, create supportive environments, and challenge gender biases. When we accomplish these goals, we contribute to the realization of a more equitable, prosperous, and inclusive world for all.

Conclusion

The historical development of Nigeria's legal and international commitments to bridging gender gaps in girl child education reflects a progressive but challenging journey. From colonial-era educational disparities to post-independence legal reforms, Nigeria has made notable strides in addressing gender inequality in education. The country's adoption of key legal frameworks such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act (2003), alongside its ratification of global conventions like CEDAW and its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrates a clear intent to promote educational equity.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, including socio-cultural barriers, inadequate implementation of policies, security threats, and financial constraints. While legal and policy frameworks exist, their enforcement remains weak, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. The high dropout rates among girls, due to child marriage, poverty, and cultural biases, further undermine progress. Therefore, achieving full gender parity in education requires stronger commitment, sustainable policies, and community-driven initiatives.

Recommendations

To accelerate progress in bridging gender gaps in girl child education, Nigeria should consider the following recommendations:

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) should be domesticated into national law to ensure its enforceability. Strengthen the implementation of gender-responsive education policies at the state and local government levels.

Establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track the progress of gender-focused education

policies. Ensure strict enforcement of the Child Rights Act in all states, particularly those that have yet to adopt it. Enhance government oversight and coordination among agencies responsible for girls' education.

Implement community sensitization programs to challenge cultural norms that discourage girls' education. Expand Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs to provide financial support for low-income families that educate girls. Strengthen legislation against child marriage and promote legal enforcement in all states.

Collaborate with international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector to mobilize funding and resources for girls' education. Encourage corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives that focus on scholarships, mentorship programs, and skill development for girls.

Nigeria should allocate at least 20% of its national budget to education, as recommended by UNESCO, with a specific focus on gender equality initiatives. Ensure efficient utilization of education funds by reducing corruption and leakages in the education sector.

Accordingly, it is imperative to state that bridging gender gaps in girl child education is not only a fundamental human rights issue but also a critical driver of national development. When girls are educated, they contribute more effectively to economic growth, health improvements, and social transformation. Therefore, Nigeria must strengthen its legal commitments, improve policy implementation, and foster cultural change to ensure that every girl has access to quality education. By taking decisive actions and fostering a collaborative approach, Nigeria can achieve sustainable progress in eliminating gender disparities in education and empowering future generations of women.

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