THE IMPERATIVES OF MERGING SKILL ACQUISITIONS AND FORMAL EDUCATION FOR THE GIRL CHILD FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
Empowering the girl child through the inculcation of vital skill acquisition in school plays an important role in the growth of a girl child and development of a nation at large. The axiom “catch them young” expresses the desire to train, cater, support and guide children early in life to develop love for education. The girl-child needs to be educated with skills needed to advance her status for social interactions and self-improvement. An African adage says ‘educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a nation’. Formal education and acquisition of skills have the potentials to heal the world of its vices and equally to assist the girl child all through her journeys in life. There are many impediments to actualize formal education for the girl child; hence, poverty, early marriage, teenage pregnancy and the likes are leading causes of girls’ dropping out of school. These socio-economic limitations could be averted when the girl child is seriously committed to studying and acquiring a skill at an early stage. Consequently, she is groomed into an independent, self-reliance and an employer of labour, these eventually reduce crime and other social vices. This paper is a theoretical research that aims at achieving a new way of learning and equally stimulates the mind of humanity on the importance of combining skill acquisition and formal education for the girl child in school thereby reducing school drop-outs. Recommendations are made to actualize a sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: skill acquisition, formal education, girl child, sustainable development.

Introduction
There are so many socio-economic impediments that hinder the girl-child from achieving her full potentials in life. These impediments and uncertainties confronting the growth of the girl child include poverty, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, diseases, illiteracy and unemployment. There is a gender bias as far as access to education is concerned in Nigeria and other developing countries. Education no doubt is the key to national development; it can transform the social, economic and political aspect of human development. Introducing skill acquisition alongside the formal education exposes the girl child to various creative skills
that will eventually help her become financially independent and maximize her educational opportunities. The challenges created in adolescence, like teenage pregnancy, sexual harassment, violence by peers and other social vices are product of idleness and unemployment which can be reduced by merging skill acquisition training with formal education as part of school curriculum. These two have the potentials to heal the world of its vices. Supporting the formal education with skill acquisition distinguishes the girl child and equally empowers her.

Formal education occurs in a structured and organized environment like institution or classroom. It is explicitly designed as education in terms of time, objectives and resources. Formal education is a model that presents a rigid curriculum, corresponding to laws and norms. Completion of each level produces certificates. On the other hand skill acquisition is based on practical and lifelong learning. Acquiring a skill while in school is a crucial notion especially for girls, symbolizes the key to enter the world of employment and steps in building a successful career. In contemporary time, white collar-jobs or ready-made professions are far less to go round unemployed graduates. However, the school curriculum does not provide opportunities for most children to acquire skills that would expose them to what they could do with their hands and brains.

Nbinna (2011) noted that low skills perpetuate poverty and inequality. Girls’ these days find their way out of school for various reasons. Educating the girl child to embrace skills training makes economic sense and can be one of the measures to keep our girls in school. Skills development can reduce unemployment, raise incomes, less dependency and improve standard of living.

Introducing skill acquisition in Nigerian schools implies concentrating on what should be done to bridge the gap between the school and labour market, where the learner will work after graduation, so as to be self-reliant in the society. Moreover, lack of skill acquisition and formal education means that girls and women cannot contribute their quotas to self and societal development.

This paper introduces the importance of combining formal education and skill acquisition for a girl child to empower her. The paper looks at explanation of basic concepts for a better understanding of the paper, reviewed some related literatures, highlighted the key challenges of the girl child and recommendations were finally enumerated.

**Conceptual development:**

**Formal education**

Scholarly article from Okwori and Ede (2012), defined formal education as the transmission of relevant knowledge into the learner to enable him to effectively adjust to his environment and live a useful life. Education gives the possessor the ability to live a useful life by contributing to the development of the society. Education has a major role to play in social, economic and political aspects of human development. It is also through the use of education that the environment has been transformed into a better place to live in. To enhance rapid human development, it is necessary that one acquires education. Formal education is transformative, gainful and is a key to societal development; it is a basic human need and has been regarded as a global agenda (Donald Kisilu Kombo, 2005).

Education system has many variations from one society to another. In Nigeria, education is organized into three overlapping stages or levels these are: the primary, secondary (junior secondary and senior secondary) and the tertiary or higher education. There is a close interaction among the three stages of formal education because the later stage cannot be sufficiently under taken without the preceding stage and any education below tertiary level is insufficient not only for the individual but also for the society. In fact for much of the progress and development needed in society, tertiary education seems to be a sine qua non. But, in Nigeria, there is real dearth of girl or women with higher education (Donald Kisilu Kombo, 2005).

**Skill Acquisition**

Many scholars defined skill acquisition according to various levels of attainments either by pupils, students or graduates. Adeyemo (2014), in defining vocational education explained that skill acquisition is a skill based programme designed at a lower level of education, it is an aspect of learning which leads to the acquisition of practical and applied skills desired to produce and retain manpower, (Nyanabo and Ahukannah, 2008). Agbara, Chagbe and Achi (2016) noted that it is a form of education designed to prepare students for industry, agriculture and commerce, among others, usually at the senior secondary or lower
tertiary level. It prepares learners for careers that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation.

Skill acquisition in vocational and technical education has been in existence since time immemorial before the advent of western education, children learn the trade of their parents through the apprenticeship system, they become tailors, farmers, black-smith, woodcarvers, fisher men, cattle rearers etc.

**Review of related Literature**

**History of skill Acquisition Training in Nigeria**

During the pre colonial era skill acquisition in vocational and technical education was mainly practiced by boys, girls were mainly employed as house maids, while the boy apprentice lives with the master for an agreed period of training. The apprentice learns by receiving instructions from the master, observation and imitation. Non indigenous companies like the Shell BP and the UAC started training artisans among their employee’s, but the training acquired was to serve the skill needed by that particular company at that particular time (Aina 2009). Such training attracts no certificate and learners struggle to improve or learn fast to gain freedom and self reliance.

The first technical institute established in Nigeria was the Hope Waddell institute in Calabar (1885) with the aim of providing education in rudiments training in the Technical trades and teachers’ education. The first vocational and technical institute to be established in Nigeria was the Yaba higher college (1948) as seen in Aina (2009). The idea was to train Artisans, Craftsmen and Technicians, together with teachers of technical education who in turn will teach in the trade centres. Skills acquired during this era should have improved more than the technician’s level. According to Nyanabo and Ahukannah, (2008), currently, Nigeria records 40 Federal and State technical Colleges, Federal College of education, State college of education, Federal polytechnics, State polytechnics, Federal and State University of technology and a number of colleges of Agriculture and forestry. Various skills have been acquired at various levels and in various fields from these institutions.

On the other hand, acquisition of skills was equally achieved after getting formal education. Concerning Nigeria experience, Adeyemo (2014), opined that skill acquisition training broadly refers to certificate level craft training is open to students who leave school after completing Primary six education or Junior WAEC; and could not continue schooling due to lack of funds or interest in learning skill. School drop outs and adults can also receive this type of education as it provides an opportunity to learn a skill or trade. Stressing its benefits, Aliyu (2006), asserts that an individual learning skills is already pursuing his/her dream job.

**Benefits of merging skills acquisition with Formal education for the girl child**

The Federal Republic of Nigeria recognized the immense role of the development of entrepreneurial skills at the basic school level when it noted that basic education should provide science and technological skills for economic development (FRN, 2004). Primary school education is the foundation on which other levels of education emanate. Given that achieving self reliance for graduates is not imminent, instead the quest for white collar job intensifies. It therefore behooves on the government to try other possible ways of inculcating the life of independency on the youths to establish job creators and employers of labour for national development.

Merging formal education and skill acquisition in the education system lays the foundation for sustaining lifelong learning; inculcate acquisition of innovative skills and application of the knowledge of science that leads to particular occupations and for the improvement of man’s environment especially at an early age (Onwuachu and Okoye, 2012; Obeten and Isokon, 2018).

The importance of education in economic and social development makes it a basic right for every child, boy and girl alike. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 28 of 1979, every child has a right to education and the State ensures that primary education is free and compulsory to all children. The State also encourages the accessibility of different forms of secondary education based on the capacity of the individual. Article 28 of the Convention on Rights of a child clearly defined the aims of education in the society. The basic aim of education is to develop a child’s personality, talents and mental abilities for the benefit of the individual, community and society at large (UNICEF, 2004).

Merging skill training and education from early stage (primary school) forms a practical segment of education. Therefore, the quality of instructional delivery should be oriented toward imparting the right type of value and attitude in the pupils. The axiom “catch them young” expresses the desire to train, cater, support
and guide children early in life to develop love for education and skill acquisition. For example, the recent experience of minimal participation of corps members in acquiring skills in NYSC orientation camps. Their major interests are in getting white collar job after graduation. More so, the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical, and social abilities/competencies were necessary for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society (Mbanefo, 2015).

However, Nigeria educational system has not given the merging necessary attention it deserves. It is obvious that emphasis on skill training while in school will lead to a paradigm shift from reliance on oil driven economy to that of agriculture, industry and commerce.

Ovbiagile (2015), highlighted the aims and objectives of vocational and technical education as contained in the National Policy of Education revised in 2004 to include: provide trained man power, applied science and technology, business particularly at craft, advanced craft, technical knowledge and vocational skill necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development, give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self reliant economically. It therefore forms a practical segment of education. For a country to advance both socially, economically and technologically, its citizens must be productive and creative and in turn become job creators not job seekers

Majority of vocational skills are found all over the world and creates employment opportunities for youths in and outside the country. There are many well-paid career fields in which a college degree is not required. This education system provides stable jobs and businesses that can improve livelihood. Examples of vocational skill jobs that can yield a better income and self reliance are; Agro-allied farming, cosmetology, fashion and design, tie and dye, hair dressing among others (Lawal, 2010). Therefore, for girls or women who are contributors to societal development vocational skill training alongside formal education is expedient and quintessential

Problems of merging skill acquisition and formal education in Nigeria

Training on skill acquisition in Nigeria has not been given the attention it deserves and this negligence leads to some obstacles in national development especially in solving the problem of unemployment. Nigerian educational institutions pay special attention to academic qualification instead of problem solving activities and level of skills acquired. According to Aworonti (2007) there is a wide gap between the curriculum content or theoretical aspect being taught in the tertiary institutions than the practical skills needed by the employees of labour and the world of work.

Lack of resources, poor funding of vocational (skill centres) and technical education which resulted to the problems of: lack of teachers, low performance of students, epileptic power supply as observed by Aina (2009) lead to short supply of knowledgeable and competitive workforce. Also, quality and population of teachers were low in terms of skill training (Adesina, 2006). Adeyemo (2014) stressed that emphasis on acquisition of certificate to take up white collar jobs drastically eroded the traditional system of education in Nigeria which was basically vocational in nature and largely run on apprenticeship system in crafts, arts and agriculture. More so, wrong assumptions that skill acquisition was supposed to be for those who cannot afford a quality education equally discouraged the young women from learning and reduced the economic opportunities for those who are work oriented. But the truth is that everyone needs to learn valuable skills in the long run. These skills serve as means of generating income which will in turn lead to emancipation of women.

Several education policies such as the poorly implemented 6-3-3-4 system were set up emphasizing the acquisition of vocational and technical skills to improve the skills-base of the population as one way of combating unemployment and poverty, and improving the economy. The National Policy on Education from (2004 Edition to 2013 Edition) in Mamman et al. (2013) recognizes and emphasizes the importance of technical and vocational education in line with our national aspiration of building the skills-base needed to promote self reliance and improve employability.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Formation and Manpower-Planning Model

The human capital formation and manpower-planning model is the framework of analysis adopted and it is concerned with establishing the fact that skill training and acquisition of good education give rise to national development of any nation (Jhingan, 2007). The theory argues that the girl child is a functional and vital member of her society and has a role to play in its developmental process and should be recognized as an
eligible player. The theory further emphasizes on the need for the provision of the various and necessary educational opportunities to help develop her creativity and skills equipping her with proper knowledge to make enlightened decisions. Her education and acquisition of skills will equally improve her values and abilities to work to better herself and her society (Deborah, 2016). Fagerlind (1997) posits that various resources a country may possess cannot be compared to the output that will be derived from its human resources if used maximally. Fagerlind further describes citizens of a nation as active agents that build its social, economic and political systems, which help carry and sustain national development. Education in itself creates opportunities for the growth and development that is desired and if government agencies makes educating its girl-child population a major priority by making viable policies and ensure its implementation, establishing programmes and incentives that motivates girls to enroll and complete their education, it will creates long term opportunity for sustained development. According to Jhingan (2007) manpower planning focuses on ensuring long-term developments using a country’s semiskilled and skilled manpower economic conditions to broaden employment opportunities through proper and adequate investment in human resource development.

Key challenges facing the Girl child Education

Early Marriage
Most parents or guardians often put pressure on girls to marry and start bearing children before they are ready. Regardless of a shift towards later marriage in many parts of the world, 82 million girls in developing countries who are now between the ages of 10 and 17 will be married before their 18th birthday (Folaronmi, 2014). Child marriage endangers the health and limits the opportunities afforded to women; it disrupts their education and often violates their human rights. Married adolescent girls often find it difficult to access reproductive health services. In some countries, marriage to older men makes girls more vulnerable to HIV and VVF.

Teenage pregnancy
Optimum population of women and girls between ages 15 and 19 - both married and unmarried give birth each year, for this age group, complications of pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death, with unsafe abortion being a major factor. The complications that may arise from early child bearing include vesico vaginal fistula (VVF). A gynecologic condition that severely impairs a woman’s quality of life (Aboh et al 2014). Girls in school present pregnancy as an obstacle to higher educational attainment. Teenage pregnancy keeps the girl child out of school and never to come back even after delivery and nursing her baby. Girls are critical agents of change in their own lives and need to be engaged alongside existing decision-makers and influencers to enhance and achieve education for all

School Drop Outs
Girls’ education is a human right. It is also our responsibility. Educating girls contributes significantly to the development of a stable, prosperous and healthy nation state whose citizens are active, productive and empowered. Yet data indicate that in Nigeria:

- Over 5.5 million girls are out-of-school (UNESCO, 2014)
- 40% women and 28% men have never attended school (NPC, 2009)
- Nearly two-thirds of women in the North West and North East regions have no education, compared to less than 15% in the South South
- The Net Enrolment Rate at primary school level is 56% for girls and 61% for boys (UNESCO, 2014)
- Drop-out rates are highest at the sixth grade of primary school and higher among girls than boys (NPC, 2009).

However, standard of educational is still low due largely to drop-outs and failure rates as well as low ratio of student-teacher, and also teachers’ morale and qualifications are generally low. On average, slightly more boys than girls complete primary school and they are particularly likely to drop out by secondary school age due to pregnancy and early marriage.

Poverty
Poverty and gender inequality are some of the challenges confronting Nigerian society. The group most affected is girls and women. These are mostly those who had early marriages, school drop outs, and teenage mothers tied down by multifarious responsibilities and cannot attend face-to-face institutions. They also cannot take up income earning jobs. The reasons for this on the part of the parents or guardian can be traced to illiteracy or ‘aborted education’, coupled with a lack of vocational skills. Poverty issues are vicious circle, parents to child; it may linger to future generations. Popular opinion has it that lack of jobs and skills are challenges currently facing young people, majority of them reported they were neither employed nor in school.

Health and society
Affirming what was earlier said, life opportunities of a girl child especially on completing secondary schooling are challenged by early marriage and pregnancy. The demographic and Health Survey for the country shows that 23% of females ages 15–19 have already had one child or are pregnant with their first (NPC, 2009). Poor, uneducated women have the highest fertility rates. To worsen this, is a generally low awareness of, and access to, sexual and reproductive health and family planning services for the girl. More so, educated women are less likely to die in childbirth and more likely to have healthy and well-nourished children than their non-educated counterparts. We know this. A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five. In Nigeria 66% mothers with secondary education give birth in a health facility compared to 11% with no education (British Council, 2012).

Merging Formal education with Skill acquisition for the Girl child
Scholarly reviews have been identified about skill acquisition and the girl-child. According to report from UNESCO, out of school children world-wide, records about 61 million children of primary school age. Nigeria’s estimate from the above records is about 10.5 million. The global figure for out of school children is estimated at 121 million, 65 million being girls. Over 80 per cent of these girls live in sub-saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2014). There is need for urgent intervention to put a stop to school-drop –outs. Educating girls according to UNFPA Report (2012) in Folarannmi, (2014) is a stepping stone to their empowerment and poverty reduction. Furthermore, a society in which girls are educated will see less child marriages and teenage mothers and high level of women participation in socio-economic process. The importance of ensuring that girls finish school successfully reduces gender inequalities as highlighted in the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs call for the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by the year 2005 and to all levels of education by the year 2015.

In recent times the standard of education has gone down, while we have so many educational bodies whose responsibilities are basically on the planning and administration of functional education. In Nigeria, school drop outs, teenage pregnancy and increasing rate of poverty contribute to academic setbacks among the girls*, for instance quite a number of school dropouts with no defined skills or occupation, are roaming the streets unable to earn their living. These to an extent resulted into a larger part of the country’s population unemployed or unutilized due to lack of skills that would make them take up gainful employment and add to nation’s productivity. Several studies showed that formal education is the only sure way to terminate generational poverty especially when a skill acquisition is imbibed.

Educating a girl child has a far reaching impact. Thus corroborating formal education with skill acquisition will more than anything empower and assist the girl child’s early pecuniary needs as well as enable her evade the twin dangers of vulnerability and insolvency.

According to reports from World Economic Forum, (2011) governments should improve their entrepreneurial environment by bringing entrepreneurship to the classroom so that every student in the primary, secondary, and tertiary level of education should learn skills and entrepreneurial principles, welcome new ideas, and give support to all types of entrepreneurs. The initiative taken by the Nigerian government to encourage entrepreneurial activity includes the infusion of entrepreneurship education into the basic education curriculum and developing up to 34 trade subjects in the post-basic education curriculum, of which senior secondary school students must learn at least one of them before graduation. To this effect, all institutions in the country are required to incorporate entrepreneurship programs into their curriculum and provide young people the opportunity to acquire an entrepreneurial orientation and skills. This infusion of skills training into basic science education is meant to provide the young science and technical students.
the mind-set for creating and sustaining innovations. Such an infusion might also produce the necessary hub for job creation, poverty reduction, and possibly launch Nigeria into the production market.

The 17th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in 2009 led to the restructuring of school curriculum jointly by the Universal Basic Education Commission and the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council to capture these community needs and aspirations. Even the curriculum review for primary and secondary schools reflects the government’s reforms as spelt out in the NEEDS, which has its focus on poverty reduction, wealth creation, and employment generation (Mamman et al, 2013). Merging the duo will definitely heal the world of its vices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

UNESCO as reported by Aina (2009) concluded that the aims of various governments to combat poverty through the establishment of different programmes such as job creation and poverty reduction have failed because graduates of higher institutions lack the necessary practical skills. Value re-orientation, poverty reduction, wealth creation and employment generation commonly known in Nigeria as NEEDS (National Economic Empowerment and Developments Strategy) can hardly be accomplished without developing Technical and Vocational education. The issue of skill acquisition has been in existence but the problem lies on its implementation from primary school.

Educating girls and women on skill acquisition helps develop self confidence, eradicate unnecessary dependency, protect from sexual exploitation, improved health care, better child education and poverty reduction for generations to come. The following suggestions are recommended bearing in mind that promoting the girl child’s education should be paramount for policy makers.

However, equal emphases should be laid both on education and on skill acquisition for girls particularly. Laboratories, workshops and skill centres should be well equipped to train pupils/students on what they have learned theoretically and apply them practically. Equipping the school scheme with theoretical and practical learning will as a matter of fact, saddle the girl child with the ability to set up in life than indulge in social vices after school.

Therefore, establishment of more skill acquisition centres, where primary school levers and secondary school drop-outs should acquire skills like carpentry, fashion design, beauty salon, cleaning ventures, laundry services, photography services, soap making, tailoring and the likes. Others are engineering workshop, motor mechanic workshop, shoe manufacturing panel beating, book binding, welding etc. All should be included into the various skill acquisition centres.

Technical and vocational education will be popularized to embrace the advancement of the girl child by introducing technical skills hitherto assumed to be for boys, for example automobile mechanic, carpentry skills etc.

Establishment of functional skill acquisition centres at all strata of education will avail the girl child the opportunity of acquiring at least a skill before graduation. Acquisition of skills for girls should be encouraged, motivated and elevated above the acquisition of mere certificates. If the present nadir of educational mediocrity must improve and experience genuine development, there should be absolute introduction of skill acquisition inherent in the overall scheme of work.

Furthermore, training and retraining of teachers at all levels to upgrade teaching methods should form the basis for the unique formal education and skill acquisition.

Social work and counseling units need to be created in all the skill acquisition centres and technical colleges to enforce career awareness and credibility of the trainees. Finally graduating students with vocational skills ought to be supported with takeoff grant from government to enable them match creativity with competency.

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