

Education Inequality: How Patriarchy and Policy Collide in Ghana

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Abstract

Being born as a girl into this world seems to be a curse. Women have and continue to suffer various degrees of injustices and inequalities spanning from cultural, social, economic, religious, and political matters. These negative attitudes have affected their educational opportunities. But globally, education is recognized as the fundamental human rights—where every child has the right to receive quality basic education; it is a critical resource to reduce poverty, inequality, and the foundation for a successful life (Fast Track Report, 2011). Studies document the enormous benefits of girls' education. This paper conceptualizes as well as theorizes the beliefs of traditional Ghanaian society on girls' education and reviews certain factors such as socio-cultural, school-related, and macro-level that impede the education of girls' and argues for a shift in attitudes and policies to minimize the gender gap and improve the quality of lives of girls.

Keywords: Girl-child Education, Ghana, Barriers to Girls Education, Traditional Barriers, Socio-Cultural Barriers, School-related Barriers, Patriarchy

1. Introduction

Nothing deserves more critical consideration in education than the inequality in education for boys and girls in the poorest countries around the globe (Fast Track Report, 2011). The barriers to girls' education have been an old phenomenon in society and have proved too problematic to resolve. Their inhumane treatment dated back since human civilization (Alabi, Bahah, & Alabi, 2013). The discrimination and abuse perpetrated against women continue in society through traditional practices, stereotyping, cultural and religious beliefs which put women at risk and neglect at any level. This has manifested in a perpetual legacy and injustice in some parts of the globe, particularly on the African continent. Women, in many societies, are viewed as incapable of making their own decisions as they have to rely on others to make decisions (Alabi et al., 2013). The socio-cultural beliefs, practices, and attitude of society tend to favor the education of boys to the neglect of girls. This calls for the urgent need for the full potential of the girl-child to be developed and nurtured “in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual, and material needs for survival, protection, and development are met and equal rights safeguarded” (Tanye, 2008, p.167).

2. Methodology

Based on the critical role of archival data in doing research, I conducted a literature search on published articles and policy documents on barriers of girls' education in Ghana and Africa. Document analysis was done on these materials (Asare & Nti, 2014; Asare-Danso, 2014), and the information is presented in this paper with respect to the notion of educating girls in Ghana.

3. Setting the Foundations for Girls Education in Ghana

Since independence, various governments in Ghana have not in any way instituted laws and policies to discriminate against the education of girls. But social and cultural beliefs, practices and attitudes of society have and continue to perpetrate discrimination against women.

A number of policies have even been instituted to ensure equity for both boys and girls. Also, the government of Ghana, as a member of bodies and organizations supports and ratifies policies that promote the education of all children.

For instance, the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana supports equal education for all children by providing Free, Compulsory, and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program as a constitutional right. Nevertheless, there is a persistent problem of gender gap favoring boys in the access, enrollment, retention, completion, and achievement in education—all of which become more pronounced from basic level through senior high school to the tertiary levels (GEU, 2001; Lambert, Perrino, & Barreras, 2012; Fant, 2008; UNICEF Ghana, 2012). While equal access to quality education for girls' is a serious concern, the government of Ghana was among the 187 countries and 147 heads of state and governments that ratified the Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum 2000) and the Millennium Declaration (Millennium Development Goals-MDGs). The World Declaration on Education for All in Jomtien, 1990, was re-affirmed in Dakar and states:...that all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning how to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual's talents and potential and developing learners' personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies (World Education Forum, 2000, cited in Girls Education Unit, 2001, p.1).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specifically Goal 3A is set to "eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015" (Am & Gergel, 2009, p.2). The priority of Goal 3 is to ensure that girls' have equal access to primary and secondary education as well as tertiary education for the broader aim of achieving "gender equality and empowerment of women and girls" (Am & Gergel, 2009, p.2). For universal primary education and MDGs Goal 3 to be achieved in Ghana, the government has demonstrated strong commitment by putting in place policies and interventions such as the Education Strategic Plans (ESP) for 2003-2015, which targets four main areas: "equitable access, quality of education, education management, and science and technology education and training" (Confed Ghana, 2012, p. 13). The ESP 2010-2020 initiative also focuses on quality, equity (particularly on gender), and developing all sectors of education and not only basic education. Again, there is the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) which was approved in 2003-2004. The purpose was to promote the education of girls. For these policies and interventions to work, the government has introduced the "Capitation grants" where the government absolves all school fees of basic school pupils by paying for every child (Confed Ghana, 2012). The government has introduced the Ghana school feeding program (GSFP) in 2005 which provides one hot and nutritious meal a day for basic school children in the poorest areas of the country (Confed Ghana, 2012). To crown it all, in 1997, the government established Girls' Education Unit (GEU) as a special unit within the Basic Education Division (GEU, 2001). The aim of the Unit is to ensure that gender parity is achieved at the Basic Education level to run parallel with the Millennium Development Goal 3A. A new Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection to help all children, especially girls, has been created by the government.

4. Theoretical Framework

Gender theory dictates the types of roles and opportunities that individuals or groups can play as well as the influences that they will command in social institutions starting from the household to the state (Alabi et al., 2013). Alabi and colleagues observe that men and women play different roles from one culture to another, and it is yet to be established in a society in the world where women are more powerful than their male counterparts. The authors' emphasize that the roles that men play tend to be more respected, valued, and rewarded than that of women. In this article, I used radical feminism theory to explain the rationale behind the barriers of girls' education in Ghana. The radical feminists hold the notion that "men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women as well as girls" (Alabi et al., 2013, p.58). Patriarchy is seen by feminists as a serious concern. Mlama, Dioum, Makoye, Murage, Wagah, and Washika (2004) define patriarchy as an "ideology and social system that propagates male supremacy or male power and superiority over women as natural and God given. The operating premise is that men are biologically, intellectually and emotionally superior to women" (p.2). On the contrary, women are seen as feeble and rely mostly on men as a source of "protection, guidance, upkeep and general survival" (Mlama et al., 2004, p.2.). This ideology has been institutionalized through formal and informal systems, supported by ideas, beliefs, practices and culture, and sometimes force is applied. Alabi and colleagues (2013) state that patriarchy is recognized as a common phenomenon that has persisted across time and cultures. Mlama et al. (2004) assert, "A patriarchal ideology is the key factor in the structural gender inequality in most of our societies" (p.2). Radical feminists view the family as one of the sources leading to the oppression of women in society.

Alabi and colleagues (2013) observe that some patriarchal structures which are in place tend to impede the education opportunities of girls' and women, thereby helping to solidify male domination. They include: "paid employment, patriarchal relations within the household, patriarchal culture, sexuality, and violence toward females" (p.58). Two forms of patriarchy have been identified in the literature—private and public (Alabi et al., 2013). Private patriarchy has to do with the kind of domination of girls and women occurring within the household at the hands of individual patriarchy. In this form of patriarchy, girls and women are socialized to believe that they cannot independently take decisions on their own but with support of men. Public patriarchy, on the other hand, is all-encompassing. In this form of patriarchy, girls and women may participate in public life in terms of education, employment and politics, however, the quality and the levels of participation may be lower when compared to males (Alabi et al., 2013). For instance, in Ghana, the gender gap in education with respect to enrollment, access, completion, and achievement favor boys from basic level through senior high school to the tertiary level.

5. Benefits of Girls Education

The benefits of girls' education have been well documented by research to have multiplier effects. Its impact extends beyond the individual and contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda (FAWE, 2013; Lambert et al., 2012). It is recognized as the most cost effective measure that developing countries can embark upon to improve the standard of living of their people (Lambert et al., 2012; Tanye, 2008). This is confirmed by Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, at the World Education Forum in 2000 in Dakar in this statement: "No development strategy is better than one that involves women as central players. It has immediate benefits for nutrition, health, savings, and reinvestment at the family, community, and ultimately, country level. In other words, educating girls is a social development policy that works. It is a long-term investment that yields exceptionally high returns. We need those with power to change things to come together in an alliance for girls' education: governments, voluntary progressive groups, and above all, local communities, schools and families" (para. 12).

Also, girls' education helps to reduce hunger. For instance, in a cross-country analysis of 63 countries conducted by the Brookings Institute (2011), gains in women's education resulted in a 43 percent reduction in child malnutrition (FAWE, 2013). Again, well educated women tend to make better and effective decisions both at home and at work; and the likelihood of earning an income up to 25 percent is high on educated girls' than uneducated, and they will invest about 90 percent in their family (FAWE, 2013). A report on one World Bank study revealed that one additional year of formal education raises girls' wages by 20 percent, and total returns on primary education were quite higher for girls' than boys' (Fant, 2008). Based on the report of the Brookings Institute's Global Compact of Learning in 2011, "low and middle-income countries lose around \$92 billion each year by not educating girls to the same standard as boys" (FAWE, 2013, p.5).

6. The Gender Gap in Education in Ghana

For the past years, Ghana has seen some progress towards gender parity in education, especially at the basic levels (ges.gov.gh; UNICEF Ghana, 2012), but the gap widens as students' progress to higher levels. Despite all the efforts and interventions being put in place by the Girls Education Unit (GEU), Donor Partners, and NGO's, the enrollment and completion rates for girls at the basic schools lag behind that of boys (ges.gov.gh). For instance, a World Bank survey report in 2011 of young people aged 21 to 24 in Ghana revealed that the gender gap was prominent at the lower level, noting that 84.1 percent of girls started primary school as against 90.7 percent of boys. Out of these, 86.5 percent of girls' completed primary school compared to 90.7 percent of boys. With respect to transition rate from primary to junior high, girls (91.5 percent) were lagging behind boys (96.7 percent). However, for those who started junior high school, girls' were seen to have the higher tendency of completing (89.7 percent) than boys (88 percent). Again, the transition rate from junior high to senior high school showed girls (51.2 percent) fallen behind boys (65.1 percent) (ges.gov.gh; Confed Ghana, 2013). The estimate of the national gender ratio for completion of senior high school is 67.5 percent—indicating that "two girls for every three boys complete SHS" (Confed Ghana, 2012, p.8). There are marked social and geographic inequalities in enrollment, retention, transition and achievement, intersecting with gender, poverty, and location at the national level in Ghana (Confed Ghana, 2012; UNICEF Ghana, 2012). The gender ratio shows a very low figure in the rural areas (51.6 percent) as compared to urban areas (73.3 percent), representing as low as 28.8 percent "in the bottom welfare quintile whilst reaching 82.4 percent in the top quintile" (Confed Ghana, 2013, p.9).

Thus, girls living in rural areas as well as those in households where welfare is very low seem to be disadvantaged as compared to boys living in the same conditions (Confed Ghana, 2013). For instance, UNESCO (2012) report stated “that 53 percent of poor girls living in the Northern region of Ghana had never been to school, compared with 41 percent of poor boys” (ges.gov.gh; Confed Ghana, 2013).

7. The Barriers to Girls Education in Ghana

Factors impeding girls’ education are multifaceted and interrelated. There are three main categories of factors causing gender gaps in primary and secondary education in Ghana: school-related, socio-cultural, and macro-level (Tanye, 2008; Am & Gergel, 2009).

7.1. School Related Factors

School-related factors serving as barriers to girls’ education in Ghana are sexual harassment and lack of female teachers as role models.

7.1.1. Sexual Harassment by Male Teachers and Classmates

Sexual harassment and violence perpetrated generally by classmates, male teachers, and males in general is one of the hindrances to girls’ education in Ghana. Classmates take advantage to prey on their female counterparts by abusing them sexually (rape) and physically (violent assault) (Tanye, 2008; Bardley, 2000; Am & Gergel, 2009), especially when they refuse to consent to a sexual relationships. Male teachers also take advantage of their female students to prey on them. Oftentimes male teachers threaten to fail them in examinations, humiliate them in public, harass, abuse, and tease them. Girls are afraid to express their experiences considering the power relationship of teacher and student (Am & Gergel, 2009). These behaviors cause girls to remain quiet in schools and classrooms or avoid coming to school (Bardley, 2000). Female students’ who consent to male teachers’ wishes are rewarded with grades and tuition waivers at the higher levels (Tanye, 2008). On university campuses, sexual harassment is rampant and women are not always able to protect themselves from their male counterparts, male professors, and senior male administrative staff for fear of victimization. Due to indiscriminate sexual harassment, husbands and parents hesitate to enroll their daughters in schools. Married women who suffer from such harassment are blamed for the treatment and their husbands may divorce them or may be subjected to inhumane practices for engaging in adulterous practices (Tanye, 2008).

The worrying part of this is that these practices are not reported. Tanye (2008) citing FAWE (1994) noted that, “FAWE identified sexual harassment in educational institutions, by both male teachers and students, as one of the most under-reported barriers to females’ education” (p.177). In all these, perpetrators—classmates, male teachers, and males in general most of the time are allowed to go free without any punishment. It is time to end this. Male classmates and males in general should be talked to by parents, and teachers by school administrators. Parents should educate their boy-children on the dangers and consequences in indulging in such acts; else, they would think that there is nothing wrong in harassing girl-children and will continue to indulge in that. Perpetrators should be held accountable for their acts. To stop or minimize the harassment and the abuse, the government of Ghana and parliament should enact legislation to protect girls’ from sexual molestations and punish perpetrators—teachers and classmates and enforce these laws stringently. Again, codes of conduct and guidelines to ensure that girls’ are safe and protected in the school environment should be written. Child protection interventions could help change attitudes and create awareness.

7.1.2. Lack of Female Teachers as Role Models

It is well documented in the literature that the absence of female teachers as role models affect the education of girls’ (Confed Ghana, 2012; Am & Gergel, 2009; GEU, 2001; Kane, 2004). Since cultural barriers in many countries play crucial roles in determining whether girls have access to education, and perform well if they have, female teachers have been recognized as critical in impacting girls’ access, retention, and achievement, even at the primary level (Kane, 2004). However, girls in Ghana and other African countries do not have access to female teachers as role models because they are few at the lower primary level to receive emotional and moral support to guide them to higher achievement (Bardley, 2000). Male teachers dominate the teaching profession in sub-Saharan Africa, unlike United States, United Kingdom, and Australia where the opposite discourse is the situation—where boys need male teachers as role models. In some countries around the world where the ratio of female teachers was low in the 1990s have witnessed significant increase of 40 percent, “but the ratio of female primary school teachers in sub-Saharan Africa is still the lowest in the world” (Kane, 2004, p.116).

The sub-Saharan Africa is dominated with many countries where women form less than half of the teaching force, except Zimbabwe, all the countries with less than 25 percent of women as teachers are located in West and Central Africa (Kane, 2004). Recruiting, training of female teachers, hiring policies, and the use of complementary teaching staff could go a long way to provide role models for girls since the evidence is clear that it works with enrollment (Kane, 2004; Confed Ghana, 2012). Huisman and Smits (2009) conducted a multi-level analysis that linked household and district-level of primary school enrollment data in 30 developing countries and concluded that girls' enrollment "was positively associated with the percentage of female teachers in the district" (cited in Confed Ghana, 2013, p.35). Also, in a Community Support Process (CSP) program that was instituted in rural Baluchistan that targeted an increase in the number of schools, female teachers, and encouraging parental involvement, reported an increase in the enrollment of girls' "by an average of 22 percentage points" (Kane, 2004, p.115). Again, in Botswana, it had been established that a positive relationship existed between schools that had higher percentage of female teachers and improvements in the learning outcomes of girls,' without jeopardizing the learning of boys (Kane, 2004). Similar findings have been reported in Pakistan, where girls' who were "taught by female teachers scored twenty-five percent higher than girls taught by male teachers" (Kane, 2004, p.116).

With such positive evidence, other female role models such as queen mothers, professional women, university alumni, senior secondary students, and prominent individuals could be recruited to encourage girls to enroll and remain in school (GEU, 2001). Such outstanding personalities could even be invited to spearhead enrollment drives and sponsor needy students. Educated women in the urban centers could be persuaded to work in or visit their villages regularly to have conversation with girls' and the community members and educate girls about the benefits of girls' education (GEU, 2001).

7.2. Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural barriers to girls' education in Ghana include education for boys' highly valued than girls,' child labor, and forced and early marriage.

7.2.1. Education for Boys More Highly Valued

Socio-cultural or traditional barriers such as societal norms, laws and rules, beliefs and practices hinder females' participation in education (Tanye, 2008). The traditional environment is culturally entrenched and as such prevents girls' from enjoying their human identity and social rights. Alabi and colleagues (2013) stressed that the girl-child is neglected and rejected immediately before or after birth when it is announced that there is safe delivery to the family. Also, the cultural mindset with respect to women's education—the dowry system, control of women's lives, male privilege, time constraints, women's lack of self-esteem, and a number of roles that females' play prevent their education (Tanye, 2008; Lambert et al., 2012). The cultural mindset surrounding female education is changing, "but there is still strong, pervasive sexism in Ghana" (Lambert et al., 2012, p.17).

The traditional Ghanaian culture has negative perspective towards females advancing in higher education, particularly in the rural areas and in the Northern Islamic areas (Lambert et al., 2012; Bardley, 2000). In these communities, many parents hold the view that the traditional roles of girl-children are to marry, procreate, care for the family and remain in the kitchen, and as household laborers, therefore investing money into their education is a waste of resources (Bardley, 2000; Lambert et al., 2012; Am & Gergel, 2009; Plan, 2012). Therefore, to play these roles effectively would not require women to have higher education credentials, hence denying them the right to education (Tanye, 2008). Parents prioritize the education of males over that of the females because they believe that males will be able to cater for the family. This socio-cultural mindset is inextricably linked with poverty as many girls' are dropping out of school or are not being sent at all (Am & Gergel, 2009). Danladi Mamman (2003) supports this with a case in Chanchaga, a small community in Northern Nigeria when a teacher described the situation of a 12 year old girl who was forced to abort her education in these words, similar to what happens in Ghana: "She is the only girl among the four children of her parents. She was enrolled in a public school, but was later withdrawn to work as a house help to a wealthy couple. Investigation into her case revealed that her father decided to withdraw her from school because he didn't want to waste his meager resources in educating a female child who will eventually be given out in marriage" (p.3, cited in Am & Gergel, 2009).

Likewise, Lambert et al. (2012) conducted a study in rural Central region of Ghana on the factors militating against girls' enrolling in schools, especially during their transition from Junior high school to senior high school. In an interview with Amastacia Kusi-Yeboah from the Holy Child Senior High School, she stated: "[Parents] believe that it is much more reasonable to send your male child to school.

Even if your female child goes to school, she will get married, have kids, and work in the kitchen. They don't seem to realize that there are women in Ghana who are making it" (p.12). The young girl is making a strong case that in spite of the negative beliefs of girls' access to education, some women in Ghana are doing well. So, Ghanaians have to consider the benefits of girls' education and change their attitudes and perceptions on that. As stated by Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, gender equality in education is a classic example of developing other areas. "Without achieving gender equality for girls in education, the world has no chance of achieving many of the ambitious health, social and development targets it has set for itself" (Am & Gergel, 2009, p.3).

Another negative attitude—neglect and rejection towards girl-children and their education is depicted before or after birth in Ghana when the news of safe delivery is announced to the family and the father (Tanye, 2008; Alabi et al., 2013). After a woman had given birth, it is common to hear men asking the question: "Is that a human being (boy) or an animal (girl)?" Literally translated in Akan (Twi language) as "Eye nipa anaa aboa?" (Tanye, 2008, p.169). Again, some Ghanaians believe that woman who are educated assume that they are equal with men. As a control mechanism, denying them access to education is the best way to avoid the equality issue (Tanye, 2008). Tanye citing Soumare (1994), stated how a professor in the United Kingdom rejected the admission of women into a Western University by arguing that, "these women will become familiar, boisterous, bold in manner, rude, aggressive, ambitiously competitive with men, thus producing a type of women we devoutly pray to be spared of" (p. 33). Society holds the notion that females who are highly educated tend to be complex, arrogant, discontent, and challenge men. Some Ghanaians believe that higher education affects the moral lives of women; they have the perception that highly educated women are very difficult to marry because they cannot become good wives, or know how to cook (Tanye, 2008). To Tanye, this kind of attitude from parents, family members, and females themselves contribute to their marginalization.

It is time for parents, guardians, and family members to critically examine their attitudes and behaviors toward girls' education, although it is a complex challenge. It is still prevalent, even in areas where positive signs have been demonstrated towards girls' education, as parents still prefer education of boys to girls. For instance, in the Ashanti region of Ghana, 50 percent of parents opted to keep their sons in schools compared to only 10 percent for girls. Also, Plan (2012) stressed that in Mali, parents were surveyed and 48 percent stated that they would keep their sons in schools instead of their daughters if they had to make a choice, as against 28 percent who decided to keep their daughters in schools.

The notion that boys can help care for the family and so the meagre amount of money is spent to educate them is an attitude that should be considered. When girls' are educated, their income level rise which could assist even to reduce the poverty cycle in the family. Fant (2008), Klasen (1999), and Kane (2004) attested that gender equality in education affected the growth of income. Klasen holds the notion that countries that do not invest in girls' education see minimal growth. Therefore, gender bias against girls is not a positive economic choice (Fant, 2008). As a way to change these complex social-cultural attitudes, beliefs, and ideas, there is the need to stress the practical value of girls' education, and how it improves economic stability, increases family income when people are working, and reduces child and maternal mortality. Lambert and colleagues (2012) add, "By emphasizing the practical value of female education, the culture may gradually accept females as a vital half of the economy" (p.15). To Lambert and colleagues (2012), it would be difficult for a developing country to progress if half of its population is not educated and unemployed.

7.2.2. Child labor

Child labor impedes girls' education in Ghana. Child labor is a universal problem around the world, particularly in developing countries. African and Asian countries have the highest total number—about 85 percent of children employed in the world (Alabi et al., 2013). Although child labor is a problem for both males' and females,' females' tend to be affected very much due to the performance of household chores (Am & Gergel, 2009). The family is a very important unit in the African society. A strong bond links the lineage and so responsibilities are clearly defined (Bardley, 2000). The traditional roles of women are to raise children and take care of the home, whereas men are responsible to work in the public sector and provide for the family.

Girls' perform similar roles like their mothers, and as such do most of the household chores to reduce the workloads of mothers (Bardley, 2000).

In a study on child labor and education in Ghana, the World Bank reported that girls start working at an earlier age than their male counterparts, and work long hours comparable to adults (Am & Gergel, 2009). Similarly, an ILO/IPEC/Ghana Statistical Service survey on labor in 2003 revealed that 2.47 million children were engaging in economic activity, and out of this number, 64.3 percent were children attending school (Confed Ghana, 2012). Whilst most parents in Ghana have good intentions for their children and are conscious of educating them—especially the girls, this falls apart as a result of extreme poverty. As such, they want their children to work alongside them in the markets and on the farm to be able to sustain the family (Bardley, 2000). It is common to see children selling goods in the market places; and in homes of men where they fall as prey to men by suffering sexual molestation, which could result in pregnancy, temporary or permanent drop out of school. The works that these children engage in contribute immensely to the economic survival of the whole family (Bardley, 2000).

Children working full-time, while attempting school work are already defeated. Indeed, this doesn't in any way help prepare them to be successful in any examination to usher them into any level of their education (Am & Gergel, 2009). The consequences are real—in some circumstances, children end up as street hawkers, prostitutes, arm robbers, drug pushers, and other criminal acts. This impedes their career as well as social mobility (Alabi et al., 2013; Bardley, 2000). Am and Gergel (2009) explain the point further, “the brunt of labor placed on girls must be defrayed to enable girls to pursue an unhindered course of primary and secondary education” (p. 8).

Although the government of Ghana had enacted laws that protect children from child labor, these laws are not being enforced allowing the situation to deteriorate. For example, Ghana's Labor Decree (1967) makes it illegal for children under the age of 15 to be employed, but it allows undefined ‘light’ work by children (Confed Ghana, 2012). It is crucial for the government to protect children from being exploited as laborers, else the country risks losing the future leaders and skilled manpower to propel the country to be competitive on the global scale to achieve its goal of becoming a middle income country. The implementation of complementary education strategy could be very important in combating child labor. Also, income generating ventures should be set up to help parents' take care of their families since this problem is associated with poverty. Parents and government should recognize the importance of the education of children—boys and girls, especially girls as a source of investment.

7.2.3. Forced and Early Marriage

Early marriage hinders girls' education in Ghana. Parents oftentimes give out their daughters to marriage when they are in their teenage years either to friends, benefactors, visitors, strangers, or even betroth them to respected persons, thus ending their education prematurely (Alabi et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2012; Tanye, 2008; Am & Gergel, 2009). Sometimes girls are forced to marry older men who are in their 50s or 60s. To prevent shame to the family through teenage pregnancy, some parents decide to give their daughters in marriage and prevent them from accessing education (Alabi et al., 2013; Tanye, 2008). The rampant system of early marriage is closely associated with poverty (Plan, 2012). The Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Ghana conducted a survey in Ghana and indicated that the country is among the highest in the world with rates of child marriage (Ghanaweb, 2014, April 3). The report revealed that about 34,000 girls in Ghana who are less than 15 years get married every year. And out of this number, twenty seven percent of girls who are in the age between 15 and 18 got married against their will. While the government and civil society are doing their best to curb the practice, the troubling aspect is that recent data from UNICEF shows that nationally the rate of child marriage is on ascendancy; and girls who are below age 15 have seen a significant rise in marriage in many regions of Ghana (Ghanaweb, 2014, July 4). According to National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), an estimated number of 407, 000 girls are expected to get married by 2030 in Ghana. The dowry system plays a crucial role in giving daughters in early marriage. The dowry system is the monetary value gained from giving daughters' in marriage. For parents, early marriage of daughters ensures high prestige for the family as well as providing valuable dowry. Parents and families believe that the dowry reduces in value when daughters get pregnant, thereby jeopardizing the full potential of customary marriage rites. The dowry also devalues when girls spent many years in school. For instance, in some areas in the northern regions of Ghana, “the initial dowry is seven cows” and three is added when daughters are able to “give birth to three boys in succession” (Tanye, 2008, p.170). To parents, the number of years spent in school reduces the number of children that girls may have.

Parents take greater interests in early marriage and dowry systems because they could use the dowry to settle debts, or use it to marry for their sons or other males in their family (Tanye, 2008). A Zimbabwean proverb demonstrates the economic value of daughters with respect to the dowry, “A man is poor when he has no daughters” (Dorsey, cited in Tanye, 2008, p.170).

Parents, however, seemed to have gotten this right on reduction in fertility as this is validated by research on the benefits of girls' education. It has been emphasized that fertility rates of girls reduce by 5 to 10 percent when an extra year is added in schooling (FAWE, 2013; Lambert et al., 2012). This is important as demands on public services are reduced, pressure on the environment is slowed down, and help find a balance between the use of natural resources and the needs of the population (FAWE, 2013). But the negative consequences of early marriage go beyond daughters as individual into the next generation (Plan, 2012). For, the likelihood of children of young mothers who are not educated to survive in their infancy, start a good education, exhibit good performance in school, and going beyond minimum levels of education is low. Likewise, daughters of uneducated mothers will have high tendency of dropping out of school, marry while young and begin the cycle all over again (Plan, 2012). Marriage suppresses the efforts of Ghanaian women to get higher education credentials (Tanye, 2008). According to UNICEF, "Ending child marriage can preserve a girl's childhood, promotes her right to education, reduces her exposure to violence and abuse, and contributes to breaking cycles of poverty that are passed down from one generation to the next" (Ghanaweb, 2014, July 4, para. 10). Putting an end to or reducing the practice of early marriage will change many lives and improves communities (Ghanaweb, 2014, July 4).

7.3. Macro-level Factors

With respect to macro-level factors, poverty is the major barrier to girls' education in developing countries. Stakeholders in education—governments, students, teachers and parents—have all attested to how poverty affects the access and experience of education (Plan, 2012). Poverty is common on the African continent, and its origin is associated with the exploitation perpetrated by colonialism and IMF and World Bank's neo-colonialist policies such as structural adjustment plans that compel countries to pay high interests on loans (Am & Gergel, 2009). African countries use high percentage of their GDP to service debt. Despite reforms in world trade, international trade continues to tilt in favor of the western countries. The western countries dictate both the prices of their industrial goods and primary commodities of African countries. This creates serious macro-economic consequences internally in these countries leading to imbalances in rural and urban areas to affect how to educate children and treat HIV/AIDS (Am & Gargel, 2009; Plan, 2012). Due to the traditional roles of women in society, the burden falls on their shoulders which trickle-down to affect the status and education of girls. Constantly, poverty compels parents to decide on how to use their limited resources as well as how best to ensure a secure future for their family (Plan, 2012). Most often, parents choose to educate boys rather than girls, making their opportunities and life chances to be severely affected (Plan, 2012).

However, every effort should be made to support parents and guardians to take care of the education of their children, especially girls. The government of Ghana has instituted a number of social interventions and policies to address the issue of poverty. One example is the capitation grant, where the government pays all fees for children at the basic level to reduce the burden on parents. Also, the Ghana School Feeding Program (GSFP) is helping to feed children. Here, children in poor districts are provided with one hot and nutritious meal at school. After six months on the implementation of the school feeding program, enrollment in the pilot schools rose by 20.3 percent (Morgan & Sonnino, 2008; Am & Gergel, 2009). The take-home ration aspect of the school feeding program intended to make available extra take-home food for girls to motivate them to increase enrollment and attendance rates. It was implemented in the three northern regions and has yielded positive results on girls' enrollment. This achieved the intended results as girls' enrollment in those schools enlisted soared from 9,000 to 42,000 (Buhl, 2012). Both the capitation grant and the feeding programs have increased enrollment, especially for girls. Again, there are scholarship schemes in place to support girls who are in need, and they should be encouraged and expanded to help more girls. Again, the establishment of income-generating schemes for women could help generate income to upkeep their family as well as support the education of girls.

8. Conclusion

I believe that if Ghanaians change their negative and marginalized attitudes toward girl-children access to education, consider the benefits of girls' education as have been documented by research, with well-planned and implemented policies by the government, not just rhetoric, could ignite a revolution in girls' education.

This is because such policies or reforms have been implemented in some countries in the world where girls' have either drawn parity with boys or overtaken them in education. For instance, in the United States, the enrollment of women in higher education before the 1980 was forty percent. But now, they are accounting for about 57 percent of undergraduate students, while reaching more than 60 percent in graduate enrollment.

It is projected to reach about 59 percent on undergraduates' students and many degrees that women may receive by the year 2018 (Weaver-Hightower, 2010). Although men are ahead of women in terms of enrollment at the doctoral level, women are reducing this advantage even at that level (Weaver-Hightower, 2010). Also, Ghana should adhere to Article 5 of the Office of the High Commission of Human Rights Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), which enjoins parties: To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women (p.3, cited in Tanye, 2008).

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