

## **EDUCATION AS A CATALYST FOR BOOSTING THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN CHILD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Nelson Mandela opined that education is the most potent force that can transform the world. The above statement also applies to transformation of lives. Education is a fundamental right given recognition under the international and regional human rights instruments and national constitutions. Education is not only for the purpose of securing a white-collar job, but also for individual and societal development. Self-image is a product of learning and an outcome of knowledge acquired at different levels of life, be it the family, school and the community. While education can have impact on the self-image of a child, equally, self-image can have effect on education of the child. In relation to the latter, it is important for a child to have positive self-image as it enables the child handle setbacks in education with ease. It is important to examine any correlation between education and self-image and if there is, concerted effort should be made, to ensure that the African child, especially the girl child have quality education to boost and enhance their self- image. While this paper is generally on the African child, there are*

*references to the girl child because of the peculiarities. This paper considers the following: definitions of the child in relation to the African child; the definition and benefits of education; laws regulating the right to education; and highlight factors affecting quality education of the African child. The paper concludes that education is a catalyst for boosting the self-image for the African child and proffers recommendations.*

**Key Words: African child, Catalyst, Education, Self –image.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of children in any society cannot be overemphasized. It is in this vein that the New York Times stated that Herbert Hoover, the 31<sup>st</sup> American President, was fond of saying that ‘Children are our most valuable natural resource’.<sup>1</sup> In Africa, the society is said to be largely structured around the lives of its children.<sup>2</sup> This is because it is believed that

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<sup>1</sup> Children Melted Hoover’s Shyness: His correspondence with them was a source of joy. *The New York Times*. 21 October 1964. Retrieved June 1, 2022 from <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/10/21/archives/children-melted.hoovers-shyness-his-correspondence-with-them-was.html>

<sup>2</sup>Howard S. Children and Childhood. *Oxford Bibliographies*. Retrieved June 1, 2022 from <https://www.oxfordbiblographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0045.xml>

See also Howard S. Childhood in Africa. 2013. *An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Retrieved June 1, 2022 from <https://www.ohio.edu/site/default/files/sites/cis/howard-editorial-vol3.pdf>

Children represent continuity and everything possible is done to ensure their survival and prosperity.<sup>3</sup> More so, children are seen as crucial to family survival. For clarity, it is apt to define some concepts used in the paper.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### 2.1 Child

While a child is a young human being below the age of puberty, a child is also a human being between the stages of birth and puberty.<sup>4</sup> The Cambridge dictionary simply states that a child is a boy or girl from the time of birth until he or she is an adult.<sup>5</sup> With the different definitions, it is apt to consider the definition of a child from the legal angle.

From the international perspective, The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>6</sup> (UNCRC), an international human right instrument, in Article 1, defines a child, as an individual below the age of eighteen except the national law provides otherwise. From the regional angle, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child<sup>7</sup> (ACRWC or Children's Charter), in Article 2, provides that a child is all human being less than 18years of age. From the provisions of international and regional legislation, it is clear that a child is any person who is below the age of 18years. In many

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<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Rathus S. A. 2013. *Childhood and Adolescence: Voyages in Development*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. USA: Cengage Learning. p. 48

<sup>5</sup>Meaning of Child in English. *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved June 1, 2022 from <https://dictionary.Cambridge.org/dictionary/English/child>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. 2014. Retried May 13, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>7</sup> ABC Press, Cape Town.

African countries,<sup>8</sup> including Nigeria<sup>9</sup> a child is defined as a person below the age of eighteen years.

Simply put, an African Child is a person under the age of eighteen years as defined by the laws in most African countries or any specified age in that country, who are natives to Africa or who trace their ancestry to indigenous inhabitants of Africa.

## 2.2 Education

Education is the purposeful transfer of ethical values and compiled knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Arnove opined that it is a field of study that caters for teaching and learning in a structured environment called school or other related or school like settings.<sup>11</sup> According to Barry, education is the deliberate and organised method of gaining knowledge, moral values, orientation, and expertise.<sup>12</sup>

Education is the process of passing knowledge of a people from generation to generation. It is therefore the process of teaching and training. Education as a process is the intentional act that occurs within a broad scope and not just in physical structures called school; school serves as the structured system established for intentional teaching and learning process that causes

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<sup>8</sup>The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF). 2013. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [http://www.africanchildforum.org/clar/Harmonisation%20of%20Laws%20Africa/other-documents-harmonisation\\_1\\_en.pdf](http://www.africanchildforum.org/clar/Harmonisation%20of%20Laws%20Africa/other-documents-harmonisation_1_en.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>Section 277, Child's Rights Act 2003.

<sup>10</sup>Arnove F. R. 2022. Education. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/education>

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Bary, C. 2022. Principles and Pedagogies in Jewish Education. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan. p 25. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from [www.library.oapen.org](http://www.library.oapen.org), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-83925-3>

development.<sup>13</sup> These definitions were further established and given credence by the United Nations (UNESCO) SDG in its Resources for Educators.<sup>14</sup>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have three principal approaches to education.<sup>15</sup> Formal education which happens in educational and training institutions (usually called school) with organised schedule of work and teaching is mostly done by a teacher. Non-formal education takes place as an addition and for some an alternative to formal education. Informal education takes place in day-to-day life, in the family unit.<sup>16</sup> With reference to formal education referred to above, a school is a place of learning with well-defined curriculum.<sup>17</sup> Not just spoken or written words are taught, schools impact values needed for social relationship and interaction, and extra-curricular activities which prepares and equips a child for engagement with the world.<sup>18</sup> The recurring words from the definitions of learned researchers reveal education to be a process which requires deliberate and systemic effort; a system where values are accessed for immediate and future development. With the robust definition of education, it is necessary to consider the importance of education and the relevance to the African child.

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>UNESCO SDG Resources for Educators. *Quality Education*. Retrieved May 12, 2022 from <https://web.archive.org/web/20220121083949/https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/materials/04>

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO Guidelines on the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning. 2012. *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved May 12, 2022 <https://uilunesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation/unesco-guidelines-recognition-validation-and>

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>Bamgbose Oluyemisi. 2004. Revitalizing the Nigerian Adolescents: A Consideration of Rights and Attendant Responsibilities. 15 *Contemporary Issues and Researches on Adolescents*. Nigeria: Royal People (Nigeria) Ltd.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*

### 2.3 Human Rights

Human rights are unified moral privileges or fundamental human necessities which every human being ought to be given or ought to enjoy under the law of his or her country irrespective of tribe, colour, religion, identity, social rank or any discrimination whatsoever.<sup>19</sup> Human rights are entitlements that belong to every individual as a result of being human; they are basic, inborn and mundane rights.<sup>20</sup> The United Nations in 1987 described human rights as those rights that are inherent in human nature without which a person cannot function as human being.<sup>21</sup>

## 3. HUMAN RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

Education is one of the fundamental human rights given recognition under the various international and regional human rights instruments as well as in national constitutions. From the above definition of human rights, if a person is denied of education or faces discrimination in education, such cannot properly function as a human being. Bernard Shaw, is therefore right when he said “Learning is a journey not a destination”<sup>22</sup>

### 3.1 Benefits of Education to the African Child

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<sup>19</sup>Andrew, A. F. Human Rights. *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. ISSN 2161-0002. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://iep.utm.edu/hum-rts/>

<sup>20</sup> What are Human Rights. 2018. *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>

<sup>21</sup>United Nations. Human Rights, Peace, Dignity and Equality on a Healthy Planet. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights-rights>

<sup>22</sup>Chase, J. 2016. Learning is a journey not a Destination.

According to one of Africa's greatest leaders, Nelson Mandela, education is the most potent force that can transform the world.<sup>23</sup> Peter-Oloye opines that a strong foundation of literacy is a must do away with poverty and ignorance.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.1.1 Nation Building

This goes to say that education is beneficial not just for the development of human personality but also for nation building.<sup>25</sup> With relation to a child and in particular the African child, Bamgbose posits that the education of a child is an important factor in the development of a nation.<sup>26</sup> To attain global development, the World Bank has said that education of the girl-child must be given priority.<sup>27</sup> The nexus between education and national development was emphasised in the World Declaration on Education for all, that learning opportunity shall be expanded for all so that every individual will participate

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<sup>23</sup>Nelson Mandela. 1997. Speech by President Nelson Mandela at the Education Africa Presidential and Premier Education Awards. *Nelson Mandela Foundation*. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from [http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=itemID=NMS535&txtstr=Education](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=itemID=NMS535&txtstr=Education)

<sup>24</sup>Peter-Oloye, A. 2021. Role of Education in Personal Development. *Prestige Nigeria*. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from <https://prestigenigeria.com/role-of-education-in-personal-development/>

<sup>25</sup>Khursheed, N. 2009. Education: An Agent of Social Change. *Kashmir Images*, 2021. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from <https://thekashmirimages.com/2019/02/03/education-an-agent-of-social-change/>

<sup>26</sup>*Op cit* n 15

<sup>27</sup> World Bank Group. Girl's Education. Retrieved May 30, 2022 from [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation)

in the process of national development.<sup>28</sup>The importance of education has close connection to a person's ambition and welfare of the future.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.1.2 Acquisition of knowledge and skill

It important for the African child especially the girl child to be educated, in order to acquire knowledge and skills needed to advance her status for social interaction. This is in line with the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially MDG 2 on universal primary education and MDGs 3 on gender equality in education.<sup>30</sup>

### 3.1.3 Generational impact

Another benefit of education to the African girl child is that a girl's education changes everything as she is more likely to grow up healthy, safe and empowered to determine the course of her life and future. She has the opportunity to decide when to marry or have children and as a circle, most likely send her own children to school. Tariq Al Gurq, of Dubai Cares describes the importance of a girl-child being educated as 'generational'.<sup>31</sup> According to him, as future mothers of the society, girls are more likely to make education a priority to their children.<sup>32</sup> There is no doubt that, with the right education, there are better chances of having a fulfilling job, which leads to improved lifestyle and respect from the society. The right to education

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<sup>28</sup> UNESCO Education for All (EFA). *International Bureau of Education*. Retrieved May 30, 2022 from [www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/e/education-all-efa](https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/e/education-all-efa)

<sup>29</sup>Abulencia, C. Why is Education Important and How Does it Affect Ones Future?. *World Vision*. Retrieved March 26, 2022 from <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/education/why-is-education-important>

<sup>30</sup>UNESCO. Education Counts: Towards the Millennium Development Goals. Retrieved March 26, 2022 from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark/48223/pf0000127583>

<sup>31</sup>Bysiewicz, I. 2018. Importance of Girl's Education around the world. *The Borgen Project*. Retrieved February 12, 2023 from <https://borgenproject.org/importance-of-girls-education/>

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*



closes the gap of inequality in opportunity, as ordinarily, an educated person has better chances in a search for job, irrespective of gender.<sup>33</sup> A fulfilled job and higher income would invariably enhance the self-image of the person involved.

### 3.1.4 Individual and societal development

According to Abbagana, education is not only for the purpose of white-collar jobs, but it is for individual and societal development.<sup>34</sup> Education empowers the girl-child to gain skills and competence therefore making them economically productive in the society. In summary, education of the African girl child, transforms communities, country and the world. It reduces the likelihood or desire for early marriage; it leads to healthy productive lives, earning of higher income, building a better future for self and families, raises the likelihood to participate in decision making, reduces inequality, contributes to more stable resilient societies which gives the society the opportunity to fulfil their potentials, child mortality rate falls and maternal mortality rate falls. It is therefore beneficial for family growth, nation building and importantly, as would be discussed later in this paper, to personality development of which self-esteem and self-image are major components and invariably overall development of the country<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Habitat for Humanity of Broward. Retrieved March 26, 2022 from <https://habitatbroward.org>

<sup>34</sup> Abbagana, K. K. 2013. Female-Child Education: A Critical Issue for National Development in Nigeria. 5. (2). *Journal of Education and Leadership Development*. Retrieved March 26, 2022 from [www.cenresinjournals.com/wp-content/upolads](http://www.cenresinjournals.com/wp-content/upolads)

<sup>35</sup> *Op cit* Bysiewicz, I. 2018

### 3.2 Education in Africa

According to United Nations sources, it is widely accepted that most of Africa's educational programs suffer from low quality teaching and learning as well as inequalities and exclusion at all levels.<sup>36</sup> Tracing the history of education in Africa, it is documented that after independence, most African leaders made education the first on the agenda with the aim to achieve global-standard basic education.<sup>37</sup> Governments embarked on building of schools followed by posting of teachers with the help of international and religious organisations; this development was met with positive attendance by children in schools, but short-lived.<sup>38</sup> Several opinions now hold that Africa's education and training is plagued with inequality, barriers at different levels, lack of quality and attention from government.<sup>39</sup>

Low level of enrolment in secondary and tertiary schools has been identified as part of the challenge education in Africa is faced with. A report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that four out of one hundred African children proceed to secondary and tertiary

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<sup>36</sup> Zipporah, M. 2017-2018. Africa Grapples with huge Disparity in Education. *United Nations Africa Renewal*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2017-march-2018/africa-grapples-huge-disparities-education>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Agbor, A. 2012. Poverty, Inequality and Africa's Education Crisis. *The Brookings Institution*. Retrieved May 29, 2022 from [www.brookings.edu/opinions/poverty-inequality-and-africas-education-crisis/amp](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/poverty-inequality-and-africas-education-crisis/amp)

schools,<sup>40</sup>this means that enrolment in secondary and tertiary institutions are below average. Ms Luisigi, the strategic consultant for UNDP Africa said<sup>41</sup>

In fact, only 30 to 50 of secondary-school-aged children are attending school, while only 7 to 23% of tertiary-school-aged youth are enrolled. This varies by sub-region, with the lowest levels being in Central and Eastern Africa and the highest levels in Southern and North Africa.

Gender inequality also exists with regards to access to education and attendance in school. This occurs more often at the expense of the girl-child who is made to stay at home because certain culture believe women are meant for the kitchen and their husband's house.<sup>42</sup> The Institute for Statistics, UNESCO states that compared to boys, more girls remain out of school in the sub-Saharan part of Africa.; there are more girls who drop out or never attend secondary or tertiary institutions in Africa compared to boys.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Oduola, A. 2017. Income Inequality Trends in sub-Saharan Africa: Divergence, Determinants and Consequences. *Regional Bureau for Africa United Nations Development Programme*. Retrieved May 29, 2022 from <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/Overview-Income%2520inequality%2520Trands%2520OSSA-ENweb.pdf&ved=2ahUKEwitpOvj0IL4AhWMwYUKHWZhBM8QfnoECAoQAQ&usg=AOvVaw3foFILX6jyolqFv6hZYP>

<sup>41</sup>*Op cit* n 33

<sup>42</sup>Williams, T. M. Girl-Child, Health and Education in Africa. In: HO Yacob, T Falola (Eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2409-2423. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4\\_162](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_162)

<sup>43</sup>Out-of-School Children and Youth. 2016. *UNESCO Institute for Statistics*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>

Poverty in Africa has huge influence on the access to education of children.<sup>44</sup> Quality in education cannot be achieved where there is high level of poverty; when it is difficult for people to cater for their daily needs (food, water, shelter) they may never consider going to school.<sup>45</sup> The set of people more affected by this are female children who most times are less favoured in attending school compared to the male children<sup>46</sup> because some believe it is a male child that would carry the legacy of the family while a female child would be married off to another family. Some female children are given out early in marriage as a remedy to reduce the burden of needs on the family while the parents also expect to be rewarded with dowry to boost their financial status. Lack of efficient systems and quality resources are challenges battling the access to education of a child in Africa; including lack of befitting school infrastructure and in some cases lack of qualified teachers particularly in rural areas which causes poor learning outcomes and achievements.<sup>47</sup> Where all of a family's income goes into children education and parents struggle to keep up with family needs, most of the children become drop-outs, are denied access to education and become more concerned with catering for daily survival.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ferguson, H. B. *et al.* 2007. The Impact of Poverty on Educational Outcomes for Children. *Paediatric Child Health*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528798/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528798/)

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>Cotton, A. 2007. The Importance of Educating Girls and Women- The Fight Against Poverty in African Rural Communities. *UN Chronicle*. Retrieved from [www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/importance-educating-girls-and-women-fight-against-poverty-african-rural-communities](http://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/importance-educating-girls-and-women-fight-against-poverty-african-rural-communities)

<sup>47</sup>Phakathi, B. 2019. School Infrastructure is still Largely Inadequate. *Business Day*. Retrieved May 29, 2022 from [www.businesslive.co.za/amp/bd/national/2019-04-08-school-infrastructure-is-still-largely-inadequate/](http://www.businesslive.co.za/amp/bd/national/2019-04-08-school-infrastructure-is-still-largely-inadequate/)

<sup>48</sup>Otieno, A. J. 2011. Effects of Poverty on the Academic Performance of Learners in the Selected Primary Schools of Asego Division Homa-Bay District, Kenya. *A Research Report*

There are instruments, treaties, and laws that regulate the right to education. They act as codes of instructions which regulate educational policies and programs. It is therefore important to consider a few that regulate educational policies of the African Child.

### **3.3 Laws Regulating the Right to Education of the African Child**

Right to education is recognised globally and guaranteed in international, regional and national legislations. It is however interesting to note that historically, the right to education was a second generation right. In earlier declarations at the beginning of the United State independence such as that of Virginia in 1776, it was not a right.<sup>49</sup> It was not until the social rights became prominent in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it became a right as seen in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDR) of 1948 and other instruments.

To buttress the importance of education, at the international, regional and national levels, the right to education are guaranteed in a number of instruments, laws and regulation. These include:

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*Presented to the Institute of Open and Distance Learning in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Award of Bachelor Degree in Primary Education of Kampala International University. Retrieved March 15, 2022 from [www.ir.kiu.ac.ug](http://www.ir.kiu.ac.ug)*

<sup>49</sup>Taiwo, E. A. 2011. Equal Access to Education and Freedom from Discrimination in Education Opportunity: An Analysis of the Constitutional and International Obligations in Nigeria. *1 University of Ibadan Law Journal*. 283 -311.

### **3.3.1 The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)<sup>50</sup>**

ICESCR was adopted in 1966. The Right to Education is recognised in articles 13 and 14.<sup>51</sup> The instrument recognises education as a tool for all-round development of an individual and the society. Article 13(2) provides that primary education should be made available, compulsory and free for every citizen of the member states, secondary and tertiary institutions should also be available and accessible.<sup>52</sup> This provision outlines the commitments made by the States Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regarding the right to education, emphasizing the importance of education as a fundamental right. It mandates compulsory and free primary education for all, making various forms of secondary education generally available and progressively introducing free education. The provision also stresses the equal accessibility of higher education based on capacity, encourages fundamental education for those lacking primary education, and calls for active development of a comprehensive school system along with improved conditions for teaching.

### **3.3.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC)<sup>53</sup>**

The UNCRC is a legally binding international agreement setting out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child regardless of

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<sup>50</sup>United Nations General Assembly as Resolution 220A (XXI).

<sup>51</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

their race, religion or abilities. In particular, article 28 makes clear provision for the right to education of every child.<sup>54</sup> According to the convention, attendance in school must be encouraged to reduce the number of drop-outs and school discipline must align with the right to human dignity of every child. Article 29 encapsulates the purpose of education to a child.<sup>55</sup> Article 28 & 29 of the UNCRC outlines the rights of children to education, emphasizing equal opportunity for every child. It mandates compulsory and free primary education, encourages various forms of secondary education, ensures accessibility to higher education based on capacity, and promotes measures to encourage school attendance and reduction in drop-out rates. Additionally, it stresses the importance of administering school discipline in a manner consistent with the child's dignity and in conformity with the Convention, and calls for international cooperation to enhance education globally. Furthermore, it specifies that education should foster the child's holistic development, including their personality, talents, and respect for human rights, cultural identity, and preparation for responsible citizenship. Lastly, it affirms the freedom to establish educational institutions while ensuring adherence to educational standards and the principles outlined in the article.

### **3.3.3 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>56</sup>**

Adopted in 1948, this international document adopted by the United Nations General assembly that enshrines the right and freedom of all human beings.

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<sup>54</sup>United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Section 26 in recognition of the right to education of every child, state clearly its expectation for expense-free attendance at the foundational stage, while technical, professional and higher education must be accessible to everyone without discrimination.<sup>57</sup>

### **3.3.4 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)<sup>58</sup>**

It is a multilateral treaty adopted in 1966 that commits state parties to respect the civil and political rights of the individual. Although, there is no express provision on the right to education, however a critical interpretation of article 19(2) of the Convention may be read to cover the right to education. The provision states

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kind, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art or through any other media of his choice

### **3.3.5 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)<sup>59</sup>**

The UNCRPD was adopted in 2008 to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by all persons with disabilities and promote respect for their inherent dignity. The Convention makes an inclusive provision under article 24 for the right to

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<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts>

<sup>59</sup>A/RES/61/106 adopted on 13 December 2006, entered into force in 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2008.



education of every individual living with disability.<sup>60</sup> The convention specifically stands for the non-exclusion of persons with disability from free, compulsory and quality primary and secondary education as well as the provision of learning facilities and languages to fit into the need of each disabled individual.<sup>61</sup>

### **3.3.6 The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR)**

The ACHPR also referred to as African Charter or Banjul Charter was drafted in 1981 by the Organization of African Union (now African Union) and brought into force in 1986 to cater for the human right necessities of member states.<sup>62</sup> Article 17<sup>63</sup> establishes the right of every African child (who is encapsulated in the word 'individual' as used in the Article) to education. All rights in the charter are to be enjoyed by every citizen equally and without discrimination.<sup>64</sup> The provision of the African Charter stands in contrast with the reality of the African girl child over the years. The African girl child has been hindered from the adequate enjoyment of these rights as a result of discrimination ranging from tribe, culture, religion and other factors.

### **3.3.7 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC or Children's Charter)**

Adopted by the Organisation of African Union (now African Union) in 1990 and entered into force in 1999, the ACRWC is a regional instrument that

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<sup>60</sup>United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities>

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>African Charter on Human and People's Rights. 2003. *The African Union Commission*, 2003. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>

<sup>63</sup> African Charter on Human and People's Right. *ABC Press*. Cape Town.

<sup>64</sup> Article 2 & Article 3, African Charter on Human and People's Right.

broadly outlines the rights and international procedure for the rights of a child.<sup>65</sup> Article 11 of the Charter elaborately outlines the right to education of a child; basic education should be free and compulsory, secondary and higher institutions must be accessible to all.<sup>66</sup> The provisions of the ACRWC and UNCRC as to the right to education of a child are similar; while UNCRC is an international instrument, ACRWC is the regional law that drives home the point for the African child. This instrument outlines the rights and protections for children in Africa. It covers various aspects, including the right to light, identity, education, and protection from exploitation. The charter emphasizes the best interests of the child, non-discrimination, and participation in decisions affecting them. Additionally, it addresses issues like child marriage, child labour, and impact of armed conflicts on children, striving to ensure their overall well being and development. The UNCRC on the other hand outlines the rights of children worldwide. Its key provisions include the right to life, survival, and development; protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation; the right to education, healthcare, and a standard of living; and the right to participate in decisions affecting the child. The UNCRC emphasizes the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions and decisions impacting them.

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<sup>65</sup> African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Treaties, Protocol and Conventions. *African Union*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*

### 3.3.8 United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)<sup>67</sup>

The SDG established by the United Nations in September 2015 was an urgent call for action for all countries of the world.<sup>68</sup> It was in recognising that, to end poverty and other deprivations, these must go hand in hand with strategies that improve such issues as education. Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal Number 4 stands for ensuring inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.<sup>69</sup> Goal 4 has seven objectives and three strategic methods of executing these objectives.<sup>70</sup> This shows the international efforts put in place by the international body to enhance the access to education of children across the world.

### 3.3.9 Constitutions of African Countries

At the national level, there are provisions in the constitutions of different countries on the right to education.

#### a. Ghana

Ghana, a West African country like Nigeria, guarantees the right to free and compulsory basic education. This is in the Constitution of Ghana 1992 as set out in article 25.<sup>71</sup> Article 38 of the constitution provides for the educational objectives which makes it mandatory for the government to provide educational facilities at all levels and in all regions and make it available for

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<sup>67</sup>United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG). Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

<sup>70</sup>Zhantu, C. 2020. SDG 4: Education. *Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report Team*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sdg-goal-4>

<sup>71</sup>Retrieved May 13, 2022 from [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/ghana\\_1996.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/ghana_1996.pdf)

all citizens.<sup>72</sup> Article 25 of the said constitution guarantees the right to equality before the law. It states that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law. The article prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including race, gender, religion, ethnic origin, creed, social or economic status, among others. It ensures that no person or a group of persons be treated unfairly or disadvantaged because of their personal characteristics or circumstances. Additionally, the article affirms the principle of non-discrimination in access to public facilities and services, employment, education, and other areas of public life.

### **b. South Africa**

The Constitution of the Republic of South African, 1996 as set out in Section 29 with amendments through 2012 provides for the right to education.<sup>73</sup> The Section outlines various provisions related to the right to education, emphasizing principles such as access, redress, and inclusivity. It stipulates that everyone has the right to further education including adult basic education and that everyone has the right to further education through reasonable measures to make such education progressively available and accessible. The Section also emphasizes on the right of children to be educated in their chosen language of instruction, where it is reasonably practical and ensures that no one may be refused admission to an educational institution on grounds of race. The state is mandated to take reasonable measures to promote the right to education, including building new schools

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<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>Retrieved May 12, 2022 from [www.gov.za/document/constitution-Republic-south-africa-1996-1](http://www.gov.za/document/constitution-Republic-south-africa-1996-1)

and upgrading facilities. Finally, a child may not be compelled to attend religious activities at a public school.

### **c. Nigeria**

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as set out in section 18, provides for the right to education. Section 18 (1) says the government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels.<sup>74</sup>Section 18 (3) provides that ‘the government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy’. The right to education in Section 18 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended is in Chapter 2 of the Constitution. Interestingly, all provisions under chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria are claimed to be non-justiciable. This means that victims of violation of this important socio-economic right cannot go to a court of law to enforce this right. The basis for this claim has been said to be section 6(6) of the constitution. There have however been arguments that Section 13 of this same constitution, counters this claim that Chapter 2 is non-justiciable. This claim has been refuted by many writers<sup>75</sup> Section 13 provides that it shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of government, and of all authorities and persons, exercising legislative, executive or judicial powers, to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of chapter 2 of the constitution. This provision outlines the fundamental obligations of the government as mandated by the constitution. It specifies that all branches of government, including legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, as well as any authorities

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<sup>74</sup>Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, Cap C23 2004.

<sup>75</sup>Ogun, F. 2020. Non-Justiciability of Chapter Two of the 1999 Constitution: A Hindrance to Nigeria’s Development. *Social Science Research Network*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from [https://paper.ssrn.com/sol3/delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID3663868\\_code3699658.pdf?abstractid=3663868&mirid=1](https://paper.ssrn.com/sol3/delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID3663868_code3699658.pdf?abstractid=3663868&mirid=1)

or individuals exercising governmental powers, are required to adhere to, uphold, and implement the provisions outlined in the specific chapter of the constitution being referenced. In essence, it establishes a legal duty for all organs of government to comply with the principles, rights and laws articulated within that particular section of the constitution. This ensures that the government operates within the framework of the constitution, respects the rule of law, and protects the rights and freedoms of the citizens. It emphasizes the importance of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law in governance.

This position of chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria not being justiciable, has been heavily criticised by human rights activists like Femi Falana SAN.<sup>76</sup>

### ***The Universal Basic Education Act of 2004***

In furtherance to the constitutional provision and mandate, the Federal government of Nigeria, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) through the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. It provides the legal framework for the implementation of the education programme.<sup>77</sup> Part II of this Act makes provision for the establishment and membership of the Universal Basic Education Commission. The Commission is empowered by the Act<sup>78</sup> to formulate the policy guidelines for the successful operation of the universal basic education programme in the Federation. Despite the fact

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<sup>76</sup>Falana, F. 2022. Justiciability of Chapter 2 of 1999 Constitution (as amended): Need for the Nigerian Judicial System to be more Proactive. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/03/Justiciability-of-chapter-2-of-1999-constitution-need-for-the-nigerian-judicial-system-to-be-more-proactive-5/amp/>

<sup>77</sup>Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <http://nigeria-education.org/literature/compulsory-free-universal-basic-education-act-2004>

<sup>78</sup> Part II, Section 9 of the UBE Act

that there are many government projects and it is being canvassed that the projects are free and compulsory basic education, the question is how free are these projects. At the national level, and as a signatory to the Convention on the Right of the Child 1990, Nigeria domesticated the Child's Rights Act 2003.

***Child's Rights Act (CRA) 2003.***<sup>79</sup>

The CRA is the law in force in Nigeria that protects and provides for the rights of a child. It has however been reported, that only twenty-five (25) of the thirty-six states in Nigeria have passed the CRA into laws. The eleven states that are yet to pass the CRA into laws are mostly in the northern part of Nigeria.<sup>80</sup> Section 15(1) of the CRA, makes it the responsibility of the government to provide free, mandatory and global standard education for every child.<sup>81</sup> Section 15(2) of the CRA, mandates parents or guardians to ensure the attendance of their child in school and the completion of primary and junior secondary level of education.<sup>82</sup> The CRA makes it an offense for a parent or guardian to fail in the exercise of their duty with regards to the education of a child.<sup>83</sup> However, section 15(7) do not apply to children with mental related issues. The caveat in section 15(7) seems to stand out and needs to be reviewed, as children with mental related issues, also require the proper education that suits their need.

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<sup>79</sup>Childs Right Act, No 26 of 2003; Childs Right Act, Laws of the Federation Cap C50 2010.

<sup>80</sup> Ogundepo, J. 2021. More States urged to domesticate Child Rights Act, empower girl child. *The Punch*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://punching.com/more-States-urged-to-domesticate-Child-Rights-act-empower-girl-child/>

<sup>81</sup> Child's Right Act, 2013 Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, Federal Government Press, Lagos Nigeria.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

The international, regional and national instruments examined above, emphasise the necessity for education as well as the responsibility of the government and parents/guardian towards the compliance of these laws to ensure that all African child have access to free and quality education. The constitution of different countries in Africa also gives credence to the right to education of a child.

Despite all the above international, regional, national instruments and laws, globally, and in particular in Nigeria, and the many benefits that education has for the African girl-child, there are still evidence of unequal opportunity to quality education based on gender. I therefore tend to agree with Pittin that “although the Nigerian government has put in a series of policy initiatives aimed at expanding education over the last decades, gender and class differentiation persist”<sup>84</sup>

### **3.4 Factors Affecting Quality Education of the African Girl-Child**

Some of the factors that affect quality education of the African child are discussed below

#### **3.4.1 Conflict**

Conflict is one of the reasons the girl-child does not receive quality education or any form of education. The implementation of education in Nigeria faces several conflicts, including: insurgency especially in regions affected by insurgent groups like Boko Haram, ethnic and religious tensions and incessant labour strikes, affecting school teachers, arising from disagreements between the government and labour unions.

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<sup>84</sup>Pittin, R. 1990. Selective Education: Issues of Gender Class, and Ideology in Northern Nigeria. 17:48. *Review of African Political Economy*. p. 7-25. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [www.jstor.org/stable/4005936.1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4005936.1)



According to UNICEF, in countries affected by conflict, girls are more than twice as likely to be out of school than girls living in non-affected countries.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.4.2 Cultural norms

The issue of cultural norms as a cause was emphasized by Umar in his work.<sup>86</sup> Adam and Bjork expatiating on the issue of cultural norms stated that, Nigeria is deeply a patriarchal society.<sup>87</sup> It is cultural belief that the male child is more productive and should be highly valued. This becomes more prominent when economic issues are weighed; the male child is usually preferred to take the priority in education than the girl child.<sup>88</sup> As families get poorer, the issue of gender discrimination becomes more obvious favouring the male over the female child.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.4.3 Religious Indoctrination

Another cause for the girl child being denied quality education has been attributed to religious indoctrination which has prevented women from performing public activities and function leading to gender subjugation.<sup>90</sup> While the northern part of Nigeria is predominantly a Muslim area, different roles have been assigned to different gender.<sup>91</sup> With reference to the north

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<sup>85</sup>UNICEF. Girls Education: Gender Equality in Education Benefits Every Child' in Girls Education. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from <https://www.unicef.org/Education/girls.education>

<sup>86</sup>Umar, K. L. Education for the Girl-Child in Northern Nigeria: A Case for Counselling. 14(2) *The Counsellor*. 77-88

<sup>87</sup> Nakpodia, E. D. and Urien, J. 2012. Gender Discrimination in Nigerian School System. 7. *International Journal of Development and Management Review*.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>Odekina, B. 1997. Integrated Rural Development: Women Involvement. *Loughborough University Conference Contribution*. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/30067>

<sup>91</sup>Kantiok, J. B. and Chiang, L. H. The impact of self-esteem on high school retention among girls in northern Nigeria. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from

east of Nigeria,<sup>92</sup> Kantiok and Chiang says that limited education is the reason why women in the north east of Nigeria, acquire only a few skills. According to the authors, the moslem religion per se does not exclude the girl child from education, however cultural misconception has put the girl child at a disadvantage and has contributed to their underdevelopment and leading to low self-esteem.

#### 3.4.4 COVID -19 Pandemic

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2022 have been a cause of the girl-child not receiving quality education, limited or being denied education.<sup>93</sup> According to UNICEF, some of the girl – child may never go back to school.<sup>94</sup> Girl Child is exposed to child marriage, forced marriage, violence, early pregnancy, sexual exploitation. An effect of the school closure as a result of government directives, was that the girl-child was shouldering more of the household labour and burdened with house chores at the expense of studying which reports showed led to lagging behind in education and eventually being removed from school.<sup>95</sup>It is noted, that with the reopening of schools after the pandemic in Nigeria, some parents decided to keep their children, most especially the girl-child from going back to school.

The after effect of the long school closure as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, especially sexual and domestic violence had its toll on the girl-

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[https://www.academia.edu/8308704/THE\\_THE\\_IMPACT\\_OF\\_SELF\\_ESTEEM\\_ON\\_HIGH\\_SCHOOL\\_RETENTION\\_AMONG\\_GIRLS\\_IN\\_NORTHERN\\_NIGERIA\\_](https://www.academia.edu/8308704/THE_THE_IMPACT_OF_SELF_ESTEEM_ON_HIGH_SCHOOL_RETENTION_AMONG_GIRLS_IN_NORTHERN_NIGERIA_)

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid*

<sup>93</sup>UNICEF. 2021. We must prioritize girls in our COVID 19 Recovery'. Retrieved March 08, 2021 from <https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/press-releases/we-must-prioritise-girls-in-our-covid-19-recovery>

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*

child especially. The violence on the child especially the girl-child during the lock-down in some cases resulted in pregnancy which jeopardized the well-being, safety and health of the children.<sup>96</sup> On the issue of the girl child and pregnancy, the Child's Rights Act in Section 15 (5), provides that a female learner who becomes pregnant before completing her education should be given opportunity after delivery to continue with the education on the basis of her ability. That was why in the case of *The Principal, Government Secondary School, Ikachi v Igbudu*,<sup>97</sup> where the student aborted a pregnancy, she was suspended from school as to instil discipline, but was allowed to write her exams as an external candidate. However, in the South African case of *Mfolo v Minister of Education Bophuthatswana*, the court held that the suspension of female students at education colleges who were found pregnant was constitutionally invalid.<sup>98</sup>

### 3.4.5 Myths

There have also been many myths which have unjustifiably denied the girl child of education. These myths which are unfounded include the fact that educated females are not submissive wives and they are promiscuous.<sup>99</sup> With the picture of the African girl child and the state of education in Africa, it is apt to consider the concept of self-image, to see the correlation between education and self-image and the effect on the African child.

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<sup>96</sup>World Bank. Girl's Education. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation>

<sup>97</sup>(2005) 12 NWLR (Pt 940) 543.

<sup>98</sup> 1994 1 BCLR 136 (B). Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://uniteforriorrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/mfolo=case.pdf>

<sup>99</sup>Rufai, A. Crude to Girl Child Education in Borno State, Maiduguri. Nigeria: Awosanmi Press Nig. Ltd.

#### 4. SELF -IMAGE AND EDUCATION

Self-image simply put, is how a person perceive himself or herself. It is a number of self-impressions that have built over time. These self-images can be very positive, giving a person confidence in their thoughts and actions or negative, making a person doubtful of their capabilities and ideas.<sup>100</sup> Sigelman defined self-image as the ‘total subjective perception of oneself, including an image of one’s body and impressions of one’s personality, capabilities, and so on’<sup>101</sup>. Bailey in his writing holds the opinion that self-image is a person’s mental picture, physical outlook, and a combination of experiences, wants and feelings<sup>102</sup>. Self-image is the individual opinion, or conceptual image we have of ourselves<sup>103</sup>; the inner interpreter that describes the characteristics of a person, intelligence, beautiful, talent and so on<sup>104</sup>. To define a person’s identity, questions like: who am I? What is my appearance like? How am I doing? How relevant am I<sup>105</sup> are raised.

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<sup>100</sup>Ackerman, C. E. 2018. What is Self-image and How do we improve it?. *Positive Psychology.com Self Esteem*, 2018. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://positivepsychology.com/selfimage/>

<sup>101</sup>Sigelman, C and Rider, E. 2015. Life-Span Human Development. *Cengage Learning, Brook*. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from [https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=aqHEAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=info:Tpt4LMbzx4EJ:scholar.google.com&ots=Adh-uO3wTY&sig=MpDzI3E1RNvZYqmana7KjEiRNdU&redir\\_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=aqHEAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=info:Tpt4LMbzx4EJ:scholar.google.com&ots=Adh-uO3wTY&sig=MpDzI3E1RNvZYqmana7KjEiRNdU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>102</sup>Bailey, J. 2003. Self-Image, Self-Concept and Self-Identity Revisited. 95:5. *Journal of The National Medical Association, Washington, DC*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2594523/?page=1>

<sup>103</sup>Mandell, B. 2020. Fostering a Positive Self-Image. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/12942-fostering-a-positive-self-image>

<sup>104</sup>*Op cit* Rufai, A.

<sup>105</sup>Cherry, K. 2022. What is Self-Concept. *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-self-concept-2795865>

The definition by Kendra that self-image is an outcome of knowledge acquired at different levels; childhood exposure, experiences with family, community, caregiver, friends form part of the values and belief an individual begins to live by,<sup>106</sup> is important to this paper. Self-Image is therefore a product of learning.<sup>107</sup> A positive or negative self-image is dependent on the knowledge an individual has access to.

While education can have impact on the self-image of a child, it is also true that self-image can have effect on education of the child. In relation to the latter, it is important for a child to have positive self-image as it is said to enable students to handle setbacks in education with ease.<sup>108</sup> Instead of being crippled by failure or setbacks in education which may be caused as a result of many factors be it economic, family background, a child with positive self-image, accepts failure as a part of life, takes more chances as a result of this and it makes the child more successful in life.<sup>109</sup>

The question then arises whether education can bring about a tremendous modification<sup>110</sup> or can ignite a major transformation in the girl-child.<sup>111</sup> Is education therefore a catalyst for boosting the self-image of the African girl child?

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<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup>The Importance of Healthy Confidence in Students. 2019. Retrieved September 9, 2019 from <https://marlborough.org>

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>Catalyst. 2021. *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary and Thesaurus*. England: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/catalyst>

<sup>111</sup>Catalyst. 2014. *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. USA: Merriam-Webster. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catalyst>

#### **4.1 Education as a catalyst for boosting the self-image for the African girl-child**

Studies have shown that educated girls develop essential life skills, including self-confidence, the ability to participate effectively in society and protecting themselves against self-exploitation and pressures for early marriage and child birth.<sup>112</sup> There is no doubt that education is a catalyst for development in many aspects of the society. The United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) has a lot to say on the importance of education to the girl-child.

Education is a utility which makes human a personality. Education for a positive self-image should be the priority of a contemporary school, and it can encourage them to improve their practice, to become more human and positive individuals.<sup>113</sup> Education can help each student to take control of his/her life and it can contribute to the psychological wellbeing that will help him/her cope with modern society. For individuals who do not have the thought that higher education was possible, completing a degree programme can provide a huge lift to their self-esteem. The boost in self-confidence can often propel graduates to apply for a new career, take new responsibilities, start a new business and lot more.<sup>114</sup> Research shows that the feeling that an individual belongs at school, is linked to higher levels of student emotional

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<sup>112</sup>*Op cit* Nakpodia, E. D. and Urien, J. 2012.

<sup>113</sup>Pranjic, S. S. 2020. Education for a Positive Self-image in a Contemporary School. 4:2. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. p. 108-115. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [www.researchgate.net/publication/338523828\\_Education\\_for\\_a\\_positive\\_self\\_image\\_in\\_a\\_contemporary\\_schoolacc](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/338523828_Education_for_a_positive_self_image_in_a_contemporary_schoolacc)

<sup>114</sup>How Studying Further Can Boost Your Confidence. 2017. *Oxbridge Academy*, 2017. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [www.oxbridgeacademy.edu.za](http://www.oxbridgeacademy.edu.za)

and physical wellbeing and better academic performance. It is positively associated with optimism, self-efficacy, self-concept and sociability.<sup>115</sup>

Lack of education can have major consequences on an individual's voice. It can hinder the development of the skills necessary to represent oneself and lead to early marriage.<sup>116</sup> Such persons especially females, typically cannot read or write and often grow reliant on their husband's income. In the end, the lack of access robs women of their potential. Uneducated women and girls in developing countries, often resort to various methods of exploitation to provide for themselves and their families.<sup>117</sup> This assertion has been buttressed by Okei-Odumakin, who condemned early marriage in Nigeria and urged the National Assembly to 'give laws that support child education, not marriage'.<sup>118</sup>

The relevance of education spans through providing children with the cognitive basis required for better knowledge of others as well as thorough understanding of problems.<sup>119</sup> Education makes it possible to inculcate attitudes of respect and culture, together with responsibility for the future.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>A Kelly-Ann, A. 2019. 5 Ways to Boost Students' Sense of School belonging. Monash University.

<sup>116</sup>Adabala, S. 2020. 5 Consequences of Not Having Access to Education. *Borgen Project*. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [www.borgenproject.org/tag/5-5-consequences-of-not-having-access-to-education/BorgenProject](http://www.borgenproject.org/tag/5-5-consequences-of-not-having-access-to-education/BorgenProject)

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Odunsi, W. 2013. Give us laws that support child education, not marriage-Okei Odumakin. *Daily Post*. Retrieved February 14, 2023 from <https://dailypost.ng/2013/07/24/give-us-laws-that-supports-child-education-not-marriage-okei-odumakin/?amp1>

<sup>119</sup>Al-Shuaibi, A. 2021. The Importance of Education. *Community College of Qatar, English Language Centre*. Retrieved February 14, 2022 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260075970\\_The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Education](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260075970_The_Importance_of_Education)

<sup>120</sup>Long-Crowell, E. and Levitas, J. Agents of Socialization: Family, Schools, Peers and Media. *Study.com*, Retrieved March 15, 2022 from

Schools have an important role to play in helping children who will become grown up members of the society develop awareness of global issues. Uncovering the potentials of an African child is facilitated by education.<sup>121</sup> All these give the girl child, the confidence needed for self-image. Self-image is an outcome of knowledge acquired through different means from the formative years.<sup>122</sup> The first three agents of socialization for Children are family, school and community. This therefore shows the very important role education plays in building the self-image of a child as it is believed that a child spends most of the active time in a day in school.<sup>123</sup>

Education aids the development of a child's thought and reasoning. It helps individual see situations from a better point of view. When a child is born, all the information needed to grow and live does not exist with him/her. Getting knowledge through education is a compulsory process of life. UNESCO described four pillars of learning which encapsulates the importance of education to self-development: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.<sup>124</sup> There are a lot of possibilities and potentials in the human mind, and the best tool to discover this is through education. Education improves intellectual growth which influences the way

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<https://study.com/academy/lesson/agents-of-socializaion-family-schools-peers-and-media.html>

<sup>121</sup>Nsengiyuma, A. 2021. What does A Quality Education mean for African Youth. *Association for the Development of Education in Africa*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://www.adeanet.org/en/blogs/what-does-quality-education-mean-african-youth>

<sup>122</sup>*Op cit* Adabala, S. 2020.

<sup>123</sup>Simel, S. 2013. Education for a Positive Self-Image in a Contemporary School. 2. *Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. p. 110.

<sup>124</sup> Peace Experiment. 2018. United Nations: The Four Pillars of Learning. *UNESCO Associated Schools*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.peace.school.nz/amp/the-four-pillars-of-learning>



a person thinks about himself or herself and others, sees things, make decisions and interact with others.<sup>125</sup>

The role education plays in boosting the self-image of an African child cannot be over-emphasized. In modernized system of education, a child is surrounded by different learning aids that teach how to speak, greet, show respect, and behave in official and unofficial gatherings and many other things. Education is a confidence booster; confidence is a necessary trait for positive self-image.<sup>126</sup> It is therefore obvious in itself that education is a primary method of promoting the self-image of the African child and like the saying goes 'knowledge is power'<sup>127</sup>

Studies have revealed that discriminated groups lack behind dominated ones on many social indicators.<sup>128</sup> Discrimination means that a person is being excluded and as such has negative impact on self-esteem.<sup>129</sup> They earn less money, are more often unemployed and they have poor health than those not discriminated against. This impact on their psychological well-being, and indeed on their self-esteem.<sup>130</sup> The impact of perceived discrimination on wellbeing has been studied in relation to self-esteem. Several theories suggest

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<sup>125</sup>King, E. Education is Fundamental to Development and Growth. *Education for Global Development*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from [https://message.worldbank.org/isp\\_error\\_page.html](https://message.worldbank.org/isp_error_page.html)

<sup>126</sup>*Op cit* Al-Shuaibi, A. 2021.

<sup>127</sup>Bacon, F. 1996. *Meditations Sacrae and Human Philosophy*. USA: Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish. Retrieved May 29, 2022 from <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Bacon+F.+Meditationes+sacrae+human+philosophy++Whitefish:+Kessinger+;+1996.+>

<sup>128</sup>Belle, D and Doucet, J. 2003. Poverty, Inequality and Discrimination as a Source of Depression Among US Women. 25. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. p. 101-113.

<sup>129</sup>Branscombe, N. R., Schmitt, M. T. and Harvey. 1990. Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination Among African American Women: Implications for Group Identification and Well-being. 77. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. p. 135-149.

<sup>130</sup>*Op cit* Peace Experiment. 2018.

that perceived discrimination negatively affect wellbeing and self-esteem. It is a general opinion that discrimination lead to a negative perception of self.

The issue of discrimination arises when the girl child is excluded from quality education as a result of the factors already discussed in this paper. As Taiwo has rightly posit, the principle of equality of opportunity in education and freedom from discrimination is the hallmark of the right to education.<sup>131</sup>

While it is proclaimed that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection before the law, this is not true about the way the girl child is treated. The ICCPR proclaims that the law prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, colour sex amongst other grounds.<sup>132</sup> UNESCO is obliged to ensure full and equal educational opportunities for all so that no one remains deprived of it, and it frowns at discrimination in the area of education especially of the girl child. Article 3 of the UNESCO Assembly adopted the Convention against Discrimination in 1960<sup>133</sup> says that state parties should take immediate measures with a view to eliminating and preventing any discrimination. Article 4 says that parties are to formulate, develop and apply national Policies to promote equality of opportunity and of treatment of in the matter of education. If a girl child is therefore discriminated against in accessing quality education, there is no doubt that in the long run, it will have a negative impact on her self -image.

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<sup>131</sup> Taiwo, E. A. 2011. The Implementation of the Right to Education in South Africa and Nigeria. *A Project in fulfilment for the degree of Doctor Legum (LLD) in the Faculty of Law at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University* 288 [PDF]. Retrieved February 14, 2023 from core.ac.uk

<sup>132</sup>Article 26 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966.

<sup>133</sup>Adopted by UNESCO General Conference on 14 December 1960 and entered into force on 22 May 1962.

It has been posited that a student who feels accomplished in his or her education will have a higher self-esteem. Self-esteem is often built and buttressed through estimable acts and achievements- even small ones<sup>134</sup>. Low self-esteem or lack of confidence leaves students doubting their ability to succeed, making them hesitant to engage in learning or take appropriate academic growth risks.<sup>135</sup>

Children are the future of Africa which makes their education non-negotiable.<sup>136</sup> The knowledge of the African child, especially the girl child will sustain Africa in living and prosperity. Education is one of the most crucial aspects of an African girl child's development; it is core for the continuous growth.<sup>137</sup> Education boosts a girl child's possibility for an excellent and valuable standard of life. Generally, the process of acquiring knowledge through the system called school is considered as a basis for financial success, communal affluence and balance in governance.<sup>138</sup> Education serves as a means to manoeuvre the differences in the world; search for good employment opportunities and have general success in life. It develops a child to think without limitation (without the box) and take up

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<sup>134</sup> American Psychological Association. 2021. Students Experience Low Self-Compassion or Low Perceptions of Competence. *Centre for Psychology in Schools and Education*. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from [www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/self-esteem.pdf](http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/self-esteem.pdf)

<sup>135</sup> Aryana, M. 2010. Relationship Between Self-Esteem and Academic Achievements Amongst Pre-University Students. 10. *Journal of Applied Sciences*. p. 2474-2477. Retrieved June 2, 2022 from <https://scialert.net/fulltext.amp.php?doi=jas.2010.2474.2477>

<sup>136</sup> Anglia, N. 2020. Why is Education Important. *Nord Anglia Education*. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://www.nordangliaeducation.com/news/2020/03/06/why-is-education-important>

<sup>137</sup> Top 10 Reasons: Why is Education Important. 2022. *University of the People*. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://www.uopeople.edu/blog/10-reasons-why-is-education-important/>

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

different opportunities in life,<sup>139</sup> and are able to become responsible individuals and in turn equipped and qualified leaders through knowledge.<sup>140</sup>

Through education, a child becomes aware of who they are, their uniqueness, strength, weakness, and learn about the different human personality which will help them build confidence in relating and interacting with others no matter who are or where they are from. The place of education is unavoidable for the upbringing of children who would be responsible for demystifying societal problems.<sup>141</sup> Some African children are no longer satisfied with basic education; they are going further to secondary and tertiary institutions and as far as studying in countries outside the continent because they know education is the key for a guaranteed future.<sup>142</sup>

Education is a vital tool for initiating quantum leap in a child's life.<sup>143</sup> Education makes a child grow to become independent and optimistic.<sup>144</sup> Education assists to eliminate poverty, providing people with the chance for improved lives. Lack of education most times causes low self-esteem to a child, particularly when he/she finds himself/herself in the company of education children and cannot communicate. Lack of education

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<sup>139</sup>Role of Education in Human Development. 2016. *Silas International School (ICSE)*. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://silasinternationalschool.org/blog/2016/06/20/role-education-human-development/>

<sup>140</sup> Ballantine and Hammack. 2009. Sociological Perspective on Education. *Sociology, University of Minnesota*. Retrieved May 15, 2022 from [www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/the-relationship-between-education-and-society-7040-words/8584](http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/education/the-relationship-between-education-and-society-7040-words/8584)

<sup>141</sup> Evans, K. D. and Acosta, M. A. 2021. Education in Africa: What Are We Learning. 30:1. *Journal of African Economies*. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://academic.oup.com/jae/article/30/1/13/599901?logi=false>

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>143</sup>*Op cit* Top 10 Reasons: Why is Education Important. 2022.

<sup>144</sup>Abulencia, C. Why is Education Important and How Does it Affect Ones Future?. *World Vision*. Retrieved March 26, 2022 from <https://www.worldvision.ca/stories/education/why-is-education-important>

serves as the most important factor hindering the development of the self-image of an African child.

Education lights up the mind of a child and gives liberation from all kinds of discriminatory cultural beliefs.<sup>145</sup> Education helps a child perceive hindrance as mere challenge which can be solved without fear<sup>146</sup>. Education enlightens the mind of an African child against racial, gender or class discrimination. According to Nyerere<sup>147</sup>, education is an instrument for attaining personal and collective freedom. It equips the mind of the African girl child from giving in to situations that brings down her worth. Relating education to self-image, education has been described both as a consumption good and an investment.<sup>148</sup> It is said to be a consumption good as money, time goes into it and the investment is the outcome to the person who is educated.<sup>149</sup> In relations to the girl-child, the investments are numerous and include self-development, self-esteem and empowerment. It is therefore right to say that education provide future financial returns<sup>150</sup>.

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<sup>145</sup>Bisong, P. and Samuel A. E. 2020. The Impact of Culture on Education in Africa: A Resolution from The Aristotelian Perspective. 4:1. *RAIS Journal for Social Sciences*. Retrieved May 29, 2022 from

[https://wwwresearchgate.net/publication/341828480\\_THE\\_IMPACT\\_OF\\_CULTURE\\_ON\\_EDUCATION\\_IN\\_AFRICA\\_A\\_RESOLUTION\\_FROM\\_THE\\_ARISTOTELIAN\\_PERSPECTIVE](https://wwwresearchgate.net/publication/341828480_THE_IMPACT_OF_CULTURE_ON_EDUCATION_IN_AFRICA_A_RESOLUTION_FROM_THE_ARISTOTELIAN_PERSPECTIVE)

<sup>146</sup>Ivorgba, A. E. Education for Liberation. *Africa Unbound*. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://africaunbound.org/index.php/aumagazine/issue-7/item/education-for-liberation.html>

<sup>147</sup>Sanga, I. 2017. Education as a Tool for Liberation: Seeking Nyerere's Understanding. 4:1. *African Research Journal of Education and Social Sciences*. p. 1-8. Retrieved May 26, 2022 from <https://arjess.org/education-as-a-tool-for-liberation-seeking-nyereres-understanding/>

<sup>148</sup>Abbey, C. V. 1997. Private Investment in Secondary School Education in Nigeria. 1:1. *Nigerian Education Law Journal*.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*

## **4.2 Efforts to Promote Girl-Child Education**

There has been effort to promote the education of the girl child and a lot has been done at the national, regional and international levels to address and promote the education of the girl-child. Apart from the laws already discussed above, many agencies are in the frontline.

The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI)<sup>151</sup> is one of the initiatives. UNGEI promotes girl- child education and gender equality through policy advocacy and support to government and other development actors<sup>152</sup>. Deliberate actions and steps have to be taken by government and school authorities. These include removing gender stereotypes from learning materials; encouraging and introducing menstrual hygiene management in schools and encouraging re-entry policies for young mothers.<sup>153</sup>

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

‘If we want our children to move mountains, we first have to let them get out of their chairs’.<sup>154</sup>

To ensure that education continues to boost the self-image of the African Girl Child, the following recommendations are made

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<sup>151</sup> United Nations Girl’s Education Initiative. Unlocking the Gender Transformative Power of Education. Retrieved May 30, 2022 from [www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org)

<sup>152</sup> United Nations Girl’s Education Initiative. What we do’ United Nations Girl’s Education Initiative. Retrieved May 30, 2022 from [www.ungei.org/what-we-do/overview](http://www.ungei.org/what-we-do/overview)

<sup>153</sup> UNICEF. Girls Education: Gender Equality in Education Benefits Every Child. Retrieved May 28, 2022 from <https://www.unicef.org/Education/girls.education>

<sup>154</sup> Nicolette Sowder. Retrieved February 15, 2023 from <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/325174035596957780/>

### **5.1 Parental involvement**

Parental involvement is a catalyst to getting the girl-child involved in quality education which invariably will boost the self-esteem of the child. Research shows that parental involvement is a catalyst to make the girl child more interested in education.<sup>155</sup>

### **5.2 Scholarships for indigent girl child**

Education is the best tool to break the girl-child away from all kind of cultural and traditional limitations. Scholarship programmes would therefore address the issues of funds and access which would not only encourage indigent girls to go to school but also eliminate all forms of barrier.

### **5.3 Addressing cultural inhibitions by sensitization programs**

Education brings knowledge and knowledge liberates. With sensitization programs, people would know better; what is and what is not, everyone would become aware of what rights they have under the law. This would not only keep the girl-child informed of discriminatory practices but the male-gender also becomes aware and jointly fight against all forms of discriminatory and inequality.

### **5.4 Removal of gender biases in school curricula.**

Gender inequality has found its way even through teaching and learning in schools. Educational curricula of all levels must be reviewed to eliminate gender discriminating words and illustrations; words suggestive of a woman as the one for the kitchen, while the man takes up other lucrative jobs,

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<sup>155</sup> Garcia, L. E. & Thornton O. 2014. The enduring importance of parental involvement. In: Ntekane, A. Parental involvement in Education (2018). Retrieved February 15, 2023 from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324497851\\_PARENTAL-INVOLVEMENT\\_IN\\_EDUCATION](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324497851_PARENTAL-INVOLVEMENT_IN_EDUCATION)

illustrations suggestive of women as emotional and weak beings and men as strong unbreakable beings. These and more must be taken out of our school curricula; the African girl-child must grow to become strong and able to face her dreams without limitation.

### **5.5 Involvement of more women in leadership positions in education related issues**

Having more women in educational related matters would be an opportunity to address the crisis in learning for not only the girl-child but also the boy-child. This would also facilitate equal representation and the breakdown of gender barrier in policy making. These barriers cannot be broken effectively when women are not involved in decision making processes or are left out of policy determinant positions.

### **5.6 Mentoring programs to encourage the girl child to remain in school**

Depending on the environment, there are more reasons for a girl-child to leave school than there are to remain in school. Mentoring programmes would encourage and give the girl-child confidence to stay in school, achieve excellence and pursue higher degree qualifications. Forums for discussion with exemplary women must be made available to ensure every girl-child is reached. Like the on-going NBAWF Mentoring programme for young female lawyers; it serves as an avenue to boost the self-image of young female lawyers of their ability to achieve any height they desire in the legal profession without limitation.

### **5.7 Enforcement of Laws to Prevent Early Marriage**

Early marriage has been identified as one of the hindrances to the education of the African girl-child, to fight against this government and relevant stakeholders must ensure the enforcement of the provisions of the law which



stand against early marriage. While work is on-going through sensitization against early marriage and other discriminatory cultural practices (which is one of the recommendations above), enforcement of the provision of the law must back this effort up.

### **5.8 Cooperative effort**

Private organizations and individuals must join hands with the government to push public sector education forward. We have a good number of private owned institutions; however, they are not affordable for average Africans. They are expensive and only affordable for the wealthier; this makes it look like quality education is only for the wealth, howbeit quality education is for everyone. The right to education is internationally recognised and enforceable; same should be the position in all African countries.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that educating the girl child is the best investment for societal development. A positive self-image cannot be attained without education. It is therefore imperative to invest in education to improve not only the self-image of a child but that of Africa as a whole. Self-image cannot be achieved overnight especially without investment in education, as education provides the right system and facilities that boost an individual's self-image. Through quality education, children her exposed to learn about different parts of the world right from their classrooms and the use of technology while some are opportune to go on excursions to different places and sometimes outside the country. Education for an African child provides opportunity for scholarships to learn in different countries of the world which exposes the

mind to higher level of knowledge, connection and interaction which profits not just the individual but the country of decent and Africa as a whole.

If Africa desires a better image and development like other continents, then investment in education cannot be compromised. The right to quality education must be made enforceable in all African states. The education of children who are regarded as ‘the leaders of tomorrow’ must be at the core of African countries government’s agenda without which the government will only be digging its own grave. The same way it is impossible to survive without food is the same way it is impossible to develop a self-image without education.

Vince Gowmon said<sup>156</sup>

While it is important to educate children, what is much more pressing is the need to love them. When education becomes more important than love, it is no longer education at all. For, tending to the delicate spirit of children is foundational if education is to fulfil its intended purpose of serving the greater whole.

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<sup>156</sup> Gowmon, V. Education. Retrieved February 16, 2023 from <http://www.vincegowmon.com/category/educationj/>