Assessment of Teacher Network for Girls Education (TEN-G) project in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses impact of the TEN-G program rolled out and implemented by Common Wealth of Learning (COL) and Centre for Girls’ Education (CGE) respectively, aimed at providing greater access to quality education and training through open, distance and technology-enabled learning in reaction to the school disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Kaduna state, Nigeria. The project has dual objective of training female teachers on Open Educational Resources and bridging learning gaps so as to return all female students back to school after the pandemic. Hence, four programs were carried out, namely; teachers’ training on Open Educational Resources, Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) and Safe Space Clubs. We employed both quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interviews and FGDs) instruments of data collection for this study. Our analysis revealed that, teachers capacity on the use of technology to access OER has risen from 19% to 100%, over 90% of school girls returned to school after the pandemic; a success which only 12.8% of our respondents feel is not as a result of the IRI. Safe space clubs were found to have bridged learning gap necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic and has improved their learning abilities. It is therefore recommended that; the TEN-G project should be sustained in order to accommodate more schools and more learners across Kaduna state and the entire northern Nigeria.
1. Introduction

In recent times, it is globally acknowledged that educating the female gender is one of the surest ways to engendering development and reducing social injustice and promoting inclusion, hence, the UN’s SDGs No. 5 (Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls) is hinged on providing greater access to quality education for girls. Strong support for the life-long effects of educating girls and women emerged and continues to emerge (Porter, 2016) from various interests and across all walks of life involving organizations, institutions, governments, corporate bodies, and individuals. This is because it is held that when women are educated, the multiplier effect is in multitudes thus; taming gender parity, poverty, child marriage, incidence of HIV/AIDS, malaria, female genital mutilation, gender-based violence, lower child and maternal mortality, population explosion along with the positive impact of increasing family living standards, economic growth, upward mobility, engendering social justice, fairness and equity and increases self-worth, dignity and esteem for the women folk (World Bank, 2014; Porter, 2016; UN 2021, Sperling et. Al. 2016).

Having said this, it is pertinent to understand that girls’ education being a product of intellectual engagements carried out within the formal setting of a school is a direct product of the quality of teachers in the said schools. Well-trained, qualified, and efficient teachers will bring positive transformations in the lives of their students and contrariwise will be the case for poorly trained teachers. There are multitudes of challenges facing the efficacy of teachers in sub-Saharan Africa which include but not limited to poor-quality education, heavy teaching loads, along with the pressure to expand their subject knowledge and improve their instructional practice to cope with the demands of the 21st century classroom. For Nigeria in particular, the campus-based teacher-training through which these teachers are produced has not been able to meet the scale of need in teacher quality (Teacher Education March 16, 2015)

In addition to other teaching skills, accessibility, and ability to use technology-enabled readily available functional teaching materials is another crucial need of teachers in the current times. This skill is largely needed if girls’ education is to be achieved particularly in the light of school disruptions such as heavy downpours, natural or human-induced disasters or pandemic (such as COVID-19) which will deter students from attending schools. However, when the teachers are technologically-savvy they can employ the technologically supported learning and mentorship system to keep the schoolgirls in session virtually through the aid of the internet, social media platforms, TV, and radio stations.

Looking at the economic realities of Nigeria as a poverty stricken and technologically disadvantaged nation, the deployment of technology in the educational sector can be a marginalizing or exclusion factor, especially for women, girls and other learners in rural and low-income settings and this challenge may be worsened in times of natural disasters and epidemics, with women and girls being the most negatively impacted (Commonwealth of Learning, 2021).
While it is largely held that, teachers in Nigeria are exerting emphatic effort to update their skills in technology-supported teaching in order to ensure continuity of learning both within and outside the school, particularly during learning disruption such as COVID-19, where pupils are kept out of school for nearly a year, for female teachers particularly those of northern Nigerian extraction who are traditionally faced with additional demands owing to their nearly 100 percent commitment to family set up, the pandemic has impacted on their access to technology and ability to support online or blended learning (Commonwealth of Learning, 2021).

In a nutshell, it is clearly understood from the forgoing that, during COVID-19 lock down, the problem of educational exclusion amplified by lack of access to technology and capacity to use technologically enabled learning systems by teachers bedeviling the educational development of the girl child particularly in Northern Nigerian rural and low-income settings may have been compounded.

Interestingly, the existence of Teacher Network for Girls Education (henceforth: TEN-G) which is a platform that increases teachers’ skills and access to technology-based teaching and mentorship capacity for schoolgirls in educationally disadvantaged locations like northern Nigerian states rolled out a project during this crucial period for two Local Government Areas (henceforth: LGAs) of Kaduna state of Northern Nigerian Province. TEN-G project is therefore a gender-responsive distance learning program with dual objectives as thus; first is to increase access and usage of technological tools (phone and internet) for female teachers in order to provide learning and learner support to their female students; second is to deploy the accompanying knowledge gotten from the increased skills of technological usage in order to close the learning gap experienced during school disruptions as well as keep their female students focused on their schoolwork so as to ensure a 100% return-to-school after the COVID-19 school disruption.

This study is therefore, an assessment of the TEN-G project rolled out in Sabon-Gari and Zaria LGAs of Kaduna state, Nigeria from 1st March to 31st August, 2021 to see how effective the project was in achieving its target objectives.

2. TEN-G as a Gender-responsive and emergency response distance learning platform

According to UNESCO (2020) prior to COVID-19, there were nine million primary school-age children, and 61 million lower secondary school-age children were out of school. Half of out of school children were living in sub-Saharan Africa. In another quarters, statistics have revealed that West Africa has the highest prevalence of child marriage globally accounting for 12 percent of girls were married before the age of 15, and 38 percent of girls were married before the age of 18 (UNICEF 2018, UNICEF 2020). These are among the numerous challenges that has negatively affected the girl-child in so many countries, Nigeria inclusive.

Gender-responsive and emergency response learning system is a kind of off-the school platform arranged with specific interest in girl child students to bridge learning gap for students that are off school because of any man-made or natural disasters or emergencies, such as wars and pandemics.
Following the COVID-19 school disruption, the shutting down of schools for girls will breed serious educational and socio-economic consequences. It was estimated that the school closures in more than 180 countries have kept nearly 1.6 billion students out of school, further complicating global efforts to reduce learning poverty (Azevedo, 2020). This will lead to the loss of 0.6 years of schooling for children Azevedo et al. 2020). Girls from rural, poor and marginalized settings will be involved in hawking and other forms of child labour to meet family ends. Others will be housed and be heavily engaged in domestic chores, and many will face the worst - child marriage. In all these, the negative repercussions of the COVID-19 lock down will increase gender parity in education, social and economic exclusion of women, increase gender inequality, mass illiteracy and low rate of returning to school among the girl child. To avert this, the TEN-G project was conceived to serve as a gender responsive or gender-specific emergency response vehicle for distance or virtual learning in order to keep the girl child in active learning during the pandemic. TEN-G is a brainchild of COL aimed at supporting efforts to provide Commonwealth citizens greater access to quality education and training through open, distance and technology-enabled learning, thereby allowing them to benefit from improved livelihoods, greater gender equity and overall economic, social, and cultural development leading to sustainable development (Commonwealth of Learning, 2022). Commonwealth of Learning is committed to promoting equitable access to quality lifelong learning for all – believing, in effect, that access to learning opportunities will lead to progress in achieving sustainable development. The question of equity raises the issues of gendered opportunities as girls in northern Nigeria are seen to be marginalized and at greater disadvantage compared to their male counterpart’s education-wise. This single objective is why the TEN-G is considered a gender-responsive vehicle for engendering educational opportunities.
It is in this light, that the project was implemented in partnership with the Centre for Girls Education (CGE). CGE is a girls’ education practice and learning hub focused on improving access and quality of schooling and learning outcomes for rural and low-income urban girls in Northern Nigeria. CGE have been pioneer in the adaptation of the Safe Space methodology to girls’ need to strengthened core academic competencies and mentored support as they attend understaffed and underfunded rural schools. CGE’s aim is to delay marriage and expand the critical years in which girls can acquire the human and social resources needed to define one’s life goals and act upon them.

The main beneficiaries of the project as shown in fig. 1 above are the female teachers’ and female students of primary (5 & 6) in Sabon-Gari and Zaria LGAs. The main activities conducted during the project implementation were:

i. Training of female teachers on use of technology (mobile phones) in accessing and utilization of Online Educational Resources in preparing learning to strengthen their capacity to support learning for female students particularly during emergencies such as COVID-19. A total of 200 female teachers were trained during the life of the project.

ii. Production and airing of Interactive Radio Instructions (henceforth: IRI) on five subjects namely, Mathematics, English, Integrated science, Social Studies, and Computer Science, and ten sessions each were aired in Alheri Radio which services both Sabon-gari and Zaria LGAs. IRI is very effective in teaching not only literacy and language but Mathematics as well (Ho and Thukral, 2009; Damani and Mitchell, 2020)

iii. Safe Space Clubs- Physical mentoring sessions were organized once a week, where 15 girls were selected as beneficiaries of each safe space club. A total of 3000 girls (15 girls per mentor) have benefited from the safe space club. The facilitation technique employed was
mainly girl centred. Other methodologies used include open discussions, group interactions and work, peer-to-peer activity, presentations, demonstration as well as question and answer segments. Ice breakers were introduced at intervals to hold the attention of girls and to create a fun-to-learn atmosphere. Each session lasted for an average of 40 minutes.

iv. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held as a form of community dialoguing and engagement in the host communities with parents, community and religious leaders who serves as support system for the girls to be motivated and ensure continuity of learning after the pandemic.

3. **Methodology**

3.1 **The study area**

Zaria is an ancient town located at **11°04’N 7°42’E** covering a total land area of 563 km² (217 square miles) in Kaduna state and houses two LGAs of Sabon-Gari and Zaria. Hence, most often than not, the name Zaria is used to refer to the two local governments mentioned above. This nomenclature is employed in this work. Zaria is home to close to a million people that are largely middle- and low-income households. Zaria is considered the academic centre of the north because of the importance accorded to education as well as the numerous learning institutions domiciled in the city. It has a total number of 179 primary schools with 4,574 teachers out of which 2,581 are female teachers.

Tables 1 and 2 below summarizes the primary educational profile of in the study area which is our main subject of interest.

Table 1. Female teachers’ availability in Sabon-Gari and Zaria

| Town     | No. of schools | No. of teachers | No. of FT | % of FT | No. of qualified FT | % of qualified FT | Teacher-students ratio |
|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Sabon-Gari | 62             | 2,055           | 1,120     | 55%     | 1,004               | 59%               | 1:50                   |
| Zaria     | 117            | 2,519           | 1,461     | 58%     | 1,377               | 61%               | 1:31                   |

NOTE: FT means female teachers; Source: Kaduna state Ministry of Education (2020)

From the table above, it is clearly seen that there are enough female teachers in the study area. Available question However, a large part of them lacks the technical skills for accessing let alone use OER platforms to improve their subject delivery in classroom teaching in line with the 21st century trend.

Table 2. Female students’ enrolment in Zaria
From table 2 above, it can be deduced that girls have a good number of students’ enrolment in both Sabon-Gari and Zaria which translates to a good gender parity index as well. Also, the completion rate is divergence between Sabon-Gari with 76% and Zaria with 98% is worrisome. In Sabon-Gari, the completion rate of 76% means for every 1000 girls enrolled, 240 don’t get to finish their primary education. Factors such as poverty, child marriage, anti-western education Hausa sociocultural practices, illiteracy of parents, hawking and other child labour endeavours may have accounted for this anomaly. It is noteworthy that, whatever factors are at play in this failure to complete school by girls in Sabon-Gari LGA, will be exacerbated by the locking down of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is for fear of this that, the IRI and safe space clubs were introduced under the TEN-G program.

3.2 Methods of Data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed in this study because of the different analytical requirements of the four TEN-G project objectives.

i. We used baseline and end line survey to measure the efficacy of technological use for teachers.

ii. Questionnaires were administered to Head Teachers to assess the efficacy of the IRI as well as its impact in returning female students to school.

iii. Focus Group Discussions were held with parents as form of community dialoguing to ensure that support system promised by parents was given to the students during the program.

iv. Interviews were held with teachers to assess the Safe-Space clubs sessions conducted particularly the objective of active learning outside during the lockdown and ensuring that all schoolgirls return to school.

3.3 Population and Sampling Technique

The total population of female teachers of 2,581 of which 2,116 (82%) need technologically enabled skill for teaching, the financial capacity of the program can only accommodate not more than 200. Hence, a total of 200 teachers were sampled through a purposive sampling technique. This is because; the school closure posed some restrictions to our reach to all the female teachers across all schools in the study area. Hence, we rely on our judgement and sampled the female
teachers within our reach and who are adjudged to be lacking and in need of technological-use training in their respective subject deliveries.

The second objective of the TEN-G project as a gender responsive and emergency response distance learning project was to ensure 100% return of girl to their classrooms after the pandemic through engaging them in distance learning program that will bridge the learning gap created by the COVID-19. It is in line with this objective that primary 5 and 6 pupils were targeted for our IRI program. Reason for the choice of these classes is because they are pupils who are about to transit to Junior Secondary School, a development which the COVID-19 lock down may disrupt, hence, the IRI was meant to ensure a 100% return-to-school for girls in order to ensure their smooth transition to Junior Secondary School after the pandemic. To measure the success or otherwise of the IRI in returning all-girls to school after the pandemic, we administered questionnaire to the head teachers across the study area in order to ascertain the number of girls that returned to school courtesy of the IRI program.

The study population is therefore, the 117 and 62 head teachers at the public primary schools in Sabon-Gari and Zaria respectively. We followed Yamane (1967) formula for calculating the sampling size and arrived at 64 at 10% level of significance. Therefore, the total number of head teachers sampled is 64. However, because higher sample size gives better representation of the population, we increased the sample beyond the threshold of 64 to our financial capacity of a total number of 84.

As for the Safe-space clubs, on-the-spot assessment and interviews were conducted on the instructors by their supervisors on the weekly basis that the program held whereas a session of FGD was held with the pupils’ parents and community leaders to ascertain the level of support or otherwise given to the female school children during the TEN-G projects.

4. Results presentation and discussions

4.1 Result for Female teachers’ technology-use training under TEN-G

This section presents and discusses the salient results gotten from the survey conducted to appraise the conduct of the technology-use training for female teachers in Sabon-Gari and Zaria LGAs under the TEN-G project.

Table 3. Baseline and end line survey on female teachers’ mobile learning training

| S/N | Technology-enabled learning skill | Baseline | End line |
|-----|-----------------------------------|----------|---------|
| 1   | % of teachers with knowledge of mobile online learning resources (social media) | 82%      | 100%    |
| 2   | % of teachers with knowledge on navigating the internet and accessing open educational resources | 19%      | 100%    |
| 3   | % of teachers with training on the use of mobile learning | 17%      | 77%     |
% teachers using mobile device to access learning materials | 89.7% | 99.4%
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% of teachers using electronic content in creating learning material | 6.9% | 98.1%
% of teachers with knowledge of script writing | 17% | 99.4%
Conversion of lesson plan into script | 6.9% | 97.5%
No. of teachers ever used recorded audio in teaching | 55/200 | 155/200
No. of teachers ever used audio editing app | 45/200 | 150/200
No. of teachers ever used converted audio to script | 5/200 | 155/200

Source: Survey (2021)

Overall, the outcome of the baseline survey before the training showed that 82% of teachers had existing knowledge on navigating the internet (specifically social media platforms although most were familiar with WhatsApp and Facebook the most), while 19% of the teachers had both pre-existing knowledge on navigating the internet and accessing other open educational resources.

At the end of the training the end line survey administered showed 100% of the participants had gained basic knowledge in both accessing and using OER to improve their subject delivery using their mobile phones.

It is worthy of mention that, the 200 female teachers trained on the use of online learning resources were the teachers deployed to conduct the IRI. Analysis has shown that, the teachers were more efficacious in their respective lesson delivery because of the newly found methods of outsourcing learning materials using their mobile phones which they had learned from the TEN-G technology-use training. This is a great feat achieved by TEN-G.

### 4.2 Result of IRI program aired on Alheri Radio station under TEN-G

On IRI, a total of 70 sessions in Mathematics, English, Basic Science, Social Studies and Computer Studies were produced and aired on Alheri radio Station and learners were found to be attentive and enthusiastic whenever lessons are not taught via podcasting. More than 15,000 beneficiaries (direct and indirect) have gained knowledge from the radio and podcast lessons. Girls affirmed that their parents made available radios or lend them their mobile phones whenever radio sessions are aired. This renewed interest in this model of learning has tremendously impacted on the number of girls that returned to school after the pandemic which is the sole aim of the IRI.

Table 4. below show the response of 84 head teachers sampled and administered questionnaire on the efficacy of the IRI in returning girls to school after the COVID-19 pandemic.

| S/N | QUESTIONS | RESPONSE |
|-----|-----------|----------|
| 4   | % teachers using mobile device to access learning materials | 89.7% | 99.4% |
| 5   | % of teachers using electronic content in creating learning material | 6.9% | 98.1% |
| 6   | % of teachers with knowledge of script writing | 17% | 99.4% |
| 7   | Conversion of lesson plan into script | 6.9% | 97.5% |
| 8   | No. of teachers ever used recorded audio in teaching | 55/200 | 155/200 |
| 9   | No. of teachers ever used audio editing app | 45/200 | 150/200 |
| 10  | No. of teachers ever used converted audio to script | 5/200 | 155/200 |
|   | Question                                                                 | SA  | A   | N    | D    | SD  |
|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|
| 1 | How educative was the IRI?                                               | 27.9| 62.8| 8.1% | 1.2% | NIL |
| 2 | Does the IRI contents conform to the school curriculum?                  | 16.3| 67.4| 14%  | 2.3% | NIL |
| 3 | Did the IRI bridged learning gap caused by the Pandemic?                 | 12.8| 53.5| 22.1%| 7.6% | 4%  |
| 4 | All female students of class 5 & 6 returned to class after COVID         | 9.3 | 68.6| 12.8%| 8.1% | 1.2%|
| 5 | Was the IRI instrumental in returning girls to school?                   | 9.3 | 53.5| 24.4%| 9.3% | 3.5%|
| 6 | Reason why some students did not return to school                        |     |     |      |      |     |
|   | (a) Pandemic                                                            | 48.8|     |      |      |     |
|   | (b) Child labor                                                         | 14% |     |      |      |     |
|   | (c) Non-challant parents                                                | 37.2|     |      |      |     |

NOTE: SA, A, N, D and SD = Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively.

From our total 84 respondents’ analysis from the survey showed that only 7% of the head teachers are not aware of the IRI program. In other words, 78 out of 84 head teachers are abreast of the IRI program aired on Alheri Radio, hence we collected their responses as seen in table 4 above. From table 4, it could be seen that head teachers who agree on the impact of the IRI program on the school children particularly female students of class 5 and 6. This is evident in the sense that, more than 90% of our headteachers-respondent found the IRI program very educative to the children, 83.7% believe the program is in conformity with the school curriculum and 66.3% affirmed that it bridged the learning gap caused by the pandemic. This supports the empirical evidence of McBurnie, (2020) who asserts that IRI improves student learning outcomes in foundational subjects – including literacy, mathematics and social studies particularly when used to supplement formal classroom-based teaching and target out-of-school children, conflict-affected children and marginalized children.

Another interesting fact is that only 9.3% of the total female students in the study area were affirmed not to have returned to school after the pandemic. Although not even a percentage of drop out is a good number but looking at the increasing or heightened health and socio-economic challenges posed by the pandemic which even before pandemic have been the reason for 24% drop out in Sabon gari LGA, having over 90% of your students in the wake of a global shock back to school is a great feat. Similarly, of 63% of our respondents held the belief that IRI Program was a contributing factor in returning girls to school. This is due perhaps the enthusiasm and renewed interest seen in the students from this novel way of bridging learning gap. It is also worthy of note that, the percentage of girls that return to school could be way above 80% because 24% of our respondents answered neutral on this question and their neutrality response does not mean that IRI
was not significant in returning girls to school to that amount of number. It just shows their level of ignorance and lack of proper record keeping of attendance of their pupils.

4.3 Result for Safe-space clubs and Community dialogue

During the implementation of the safe spaces, reports gotten from the on-the-spot supervision of the weekly sessions show that, girls seemed to be more open and got along easily with the mentors. Girls were also quick to respond to mentor’s questions, this in a way improved girls’ self-esteem because they were given the opportunity to speak. This also encouraged girls’ attendance at the safe spaces, hence, has bridged learning gap necessitated by COVID-19 pandemic at the same time has improved their learning abilities.

The Focused Group Discussion held as a form of community dialogue revealed that, parents committed to giving girls access to radio once the sessions are aired kept to their word. They were given access to listen to the sessions on radio when they let their parents know the scheduled time for airing. Some girls had access to their mother’s or older siblings’ mobile phones to listen to the radio sessions.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, 200 female teachers were trained on the use of mobile phones to access e-learning materials. The trainings have strengthened teachers’ capacity and skills and supported them to better engage pupils (especially girls) in their various schools. The learnings from the engagement with teachers have fostered deeper understanding and interactions with issues that pertain to the girls’ education. During the project, capacity of teachers in using technology to tutor learners has greatly improved, radio and podcast lessons has drawn more attention and attendance of learners. This fact was established when the beneficiary teachers were deployed to conduct an IRI program which recorded huge success in its mandate of returning all schoolgirls back to school in Sabon-Gari and Zaria LGAs.

Owing to the success of the TEN-G project mentioned above, it is therefore, recommended that:

i. the TEN-G project should be sustained,
ii. more schools and more learners across Kaduna state should be engaged in the next phase of implementing the TEN-G project, hence the need to expand these trainings for teachers.
iii. more community engagements need to be held with stakeholders and parents to ensure sustainability strategies beyond projects year of implementation.

6. Challenges Faced during the Program

Despite the huge success of the project, there were some myriads of challenges faced during the implementation of the TEN-G project which going forward, we need to address them. They are thus:
i. Budget line: paucity of funds was a great hindrance to the success of this project as production and airing of radio lessons and advocacy messages at Queen FM was canceled due to 55% hike in the airtime price. Hence, the project aired the audio lessons only on Alheri radio.

ii. Translating advocacy messages from local language to English language proved to be difficult for some of the advocates.

iii. Security issues: It was difficult to access some schools in Sabon Gari local government area as there were reports of banditry and kidnappings within the community where the school is located.

iv. Short training time for teachers: there is the need to allocate more time for trainings, this is to enable the teachers effectively step down the trainings in their various schools.

v. Several teachers experienced studio fright as this was their first time to engage in studio recording.

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