

Perception, Attitude and Practices of Parents in Okene, Nigeria towards Girl-Child Education

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Abstract- Girls and boys have the same rights to a quality education. But the 'gender gap' becomes painfully evident when looking at who is in the classroom. The need for the girl-child education in the society is not only imperative but it is indispensable for the socio-economic development of Nigeria. Nigerian girls are still disadvantaged in their access to education. The study was therefore conducted to assess the perception, attitude and practices of parents in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State towards girl-child education. It was a descriptive cross sectional study aimed at providing baseline information for subsequent intervention. The sample size was 370 parents with children of school age. Equal number of male and female respondents was sampled and the sampling technique was multistage sampling technique. Data collection was through interviewer administered questionnaire. The data obtained was analyzed by the computer using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software package, version 15. The study revealed that the perception and attitude of respondents towards girl-child education was good. Over 90% of respondents were aware that education is a child right. Over 90% of them also think that enrolling girl-child in primary school is important. Most of the respondents believed in enrolling their girl-child in primary school between the ages of two and five and about 90% of them thought that female child should be educated up to the tertiary level. There was still a lag in primary school completion among girls with a higher value when compared with the boys. The percentage of female drop out from primary school was 8.2% compared with 2.7% for males. Poverty was the major cause of female children's school dropout among respondents.

Index Terms- Girl-child, education, parents, perception, attitude, practice.

I. INTRODUCTION

The importance of education to human beings cannot be over emphasized. Education is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings solely by reason of being human. The relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment [1]. This is why there has been a lot of emphasis particularly in recent times for all citizens of the world to have access to basic education.

The importance and linkage of education to the development of any society is well known. It is in recognition of this importance that the international community and governments all over the world have made commitments for citizens to have access to education. Meanwhile, it has been documented that across the globe, there are inequalities in educational access and achievements as well as high levels of absolute educational deprivation especially in children [2]. Girls constitute the largest population of illiterate children in the world till date [3]. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that every person has a right to education. In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All which took place in Jomtien, Thailand, declared among others that every person shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. In realization of the importance of the girl child, concerted efforts are being mounted by the governments at various levels to improve female participation in education and redress the gender inequalities in education enrolment and retention. UNICEF's long-term goal is for all the children to have access to complete and quality education. The international goals connected to girls' education include Millennium Development Goals, A World Fit for Children Goals and Dakar Goals (World Education Forum).

In 1990, 20% of the world's primary school aged children were out of school, two-third of them girls. About 25% of the world's girls are not in school as at 1999 [4]. Estimates in 2002 indicated that the number of children out of school had been brought down to about 115 million worldwide; 62 million were girls [5]. While there were more children than ever in the world's primary schools, far too many remain absent- the majority girls [5].

All regions have increased overall school enrolments- the world average was 81% by 2002 – but the number can be deceiving. Regional variation is enormous, Latin America and the Caribbean enrolment rates are close to North America and Western Europe, 94% and 97% respectively; South Asia lags behind at 74% and sub-Saharan Africa languishes at a mere 59% [5].

Many Third World or poor developing nations face severe economic pressures and this usually gives little room for designing and initiating programs to improve girl child education. It has been observed that some measures could be adopted even within tight financial limits to redress gender inequality in educational enrolment and retention [6]. Nigeria has had a National policy on education since 1981; it has not been implemented effectively and efficiently due to rapid population growth, insufficient political will, a long period of

undemocratic governance and poor management of scarce resources [7]. The national literacy rate for females is only 56%, compared to 72% for males and in certain states the female literacy enrolment and achievement rates are much lower [7]. Meanwhile, the education system in Nigeria is guided by the broad National objectives which are articulated in the National Policy on Education. At its inception in 1999, in response to the challenges in the primary education sector, the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act provide the legal framework for the implementation of the program, which makes basic education not only free but also compulsory [7]. In addition, as a signatory to the 2000 World Education government has also established a National EFA coordination unit under the Federal Ministry of Education mandated to prepare a National Action Plan for the delivery of EFA in Nigeria.

The failure to educate girls can be overlooked when reviewing the data. Girls are often 'invisible' - not reported or underreported. Countries report averages and conceal very serious gender disparities between internal regions and economic and ethnic groups [8].

The gender gap in primary school enrolment has narrowed during the 1990s. The ratio of girls' gross enrolment rate to boys' in developing countries increased from 0.82 to 0.92. But girls' primary school completion rates lag, 76% compared with 85% for boys [8].

Statistics indicate glaring imbalances against girls in enrolment, attendance and completion rates in all levels of education in Nigeria, particularly in the northern parts of the country, due to a variety of socio-cultural and religious factors [3]. A recent estimate has sub-Saharan Africa at its current pace achieving universal primary education by 2129 [8]. Extraordinary progress in Africa must be made in the next few years if the 'Education For All' goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be met by 2015.

This study is therefore aimed at assessing the perception, attitude and practices of parents towards girl-child education in Okene, a Local Government Area in Nigeria. This will produce relevant information that can aid in intervention processes which will facilitate prompt achievement of the necessary goals related to girl-child education before or by its intended time.

II. METHOD

This study was conducted in Okene Local Government Area. Okene is situated in Kogi central senatorial district of Kogi State, Nigeria. It consists of eleven wards which include Bariki, Lafia/Obessa, Onuukoko, Abuga/Ozuja, Oritesu, Idoji, Otutu, Obehira uvete, Obehira eba, Upogoro/Odenku and Okenegba/Agasa/Ahachi. It is bounded to the north by Adavi Local Government Area of the same state, to the south by Edo State, to the west by Ondo State and to the east by Ajaokuta Local Government also of the same state. It has population size of about 500,000 people [9].

Language spoken is Ebira. Other inhabitants of the place are the Ibos, Hausas, Yorubas and Igalas. Predominant religions are Islam and Christianity. The common type of marriage is the traditional marriage and polygamous families are very rampant in the area. The predominant indigenous occupations are hunting and farming. The Local Government area has 105 primary

schools, 32 UBE junior secondary schools, 15 regular secondary schools and no tertiary institution except for an Anglican seminary.

The study design was a descriptive cross sectional study of the population in question. Study population included all male and female parents in Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State with children of school age (5 to 18 years of age). Using the Fischer's formula to obtain the sample size for a population greater than 10,000 people and using 65% (that is, 0.65) obtained from similar study as the proportion in the target population estimated to have a particular characteristics (p), 370 parents were used for this study [10][11].

Multistage sampling technique involving five stages sampling procedures was used as follows:

- **Procedure 1:** Six wards out of eleven wards were selected using simple random sampling. This was done by simple balloting.
- **Procedure 2:** All the selected wards had different numbers of streets. Three streets were selected to represent each of the selected wards using simple random sampling. This was done by simple balloting.
- **Procedure 3:** Eleven households were then selected from each of the selected streets using systematic sampling procedure. This was done by standing in the middle of the street and spinning a bottle. Whichever household the bottle faced served as the starting point and since every street had different numbers of households, households were therefore sampled at K^{th} intervals until a total of eleven households that meet the inclusion areas were sampled. K being the sampling interval for each street. N was the estimated number of houses in the street divided by sample size (n) which is eleven.
$$K = \frac{N}{n}$$
- **Procedure 4:** A male parent who met the inclusion criteria in every household was interviewed. Where the male parents in a household were more than one, simple random sampling by simple balloting was used to select just one parent.
- **Procedure 5:** Procedures 3 and 4 were repeated for female parents as equal number of male and female parents was used for the study.

Data collection was through interviewer administered questionnaire survey. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was done among 50 respondents meeting the inclusion criteria in Adavi Local Government Area, another local government area in the same state. Data was coded and analyzed with the computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software package version 15. Analyses were presented in form of frequency tables.

III. RESULTS

A total of 370 respondents were used for this study with equal number of males and females. The age distribution shows that majority (133; 35.9%) were in the age grouping of 40-49 years (Table 1). Their ages ranged from 21 to 75 years with a mean of 45.7 ± 9.9 years. Modal age was 50 years.

Marital status of respondents showed that 316 (85.4%) were married; 20 (5.4%) were either widows or widowers; 17 (4.6%) were separated and 8 (2.2%) were divorced. One hundred and eighty eight (50.8%) of respondents were Christians while 182 (49.2%) were Muslims.

Half of the respondents had tertiary education and 58% of them were civil servants. Others under the respondents status were either retired or were students corresponding to 29 (8%) of respondents (Table 1). The average number of female children of school age per respondent was 2.1 ± 1.13 with a range of 9.

Table 1: Socio-demographic data of respondents

Respondents' data	Frequency (%)
Ages in years	
20-29	15 (4.1)
30-39	80 (21.6)
40-49	133 (35.9)
50-59	104 (28.1)
60-69	35 (9.5)
70-79	3 (0.8)
Educational status	
None	22 (6)
Primary	59 (16)
Secondary	102 (28)
Tertiary	185 (50)
Employment status	
Unemployed	26 (7)
Civil servants	215 (58)
Self employed	100 (27)
Others	29 (8)

Majority of the respondents said that they were aware that education is a child right and think it is important to enroll their female children in primary school- frequencies of 365 (98.6%) and 358 (96.8%) respectively.

Allowing for multiple responses, tables 2 and 3 show the factors that prevent girl-child education and benefits of girl-child education identified by respondents respectively.

Table 4 shows the parents responses on school enrollment age for children; 146 (39.5%) and 138(37.3%) of the parents said age 3 was the best for males and females respectively.

Table 2: Respondents' perception on the factors that prevent girl-child education

Factors	Frequency (%)
Early marriage among females	336 (90.8)
Poverty among households	328 (88.6)
Pregnancy among girls of school age	305 (82.4)
Gender discrimination in the society	75 (20.3)
HIV/AIDS prevalence among girls of school age	25 (6.8)
Culture, tradition and religion	24 (6.5)

Lack of female teachers in schools	22 (5.9)
Ignorance on part of the parents on importance of girl-child education	19 (5.1)
Violence in schools like bullying and corporal punishment	18 (4.9)
Lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in school	18 (4.9)
Attitude of some fathers towards girl-child education	4 (1.1)
Refusal of some girls to go to school for no reason	1 (0.3)
Marital status of the parents	1 (0.3)

Table 3: Respondents' perception on benefits of girl-child education

Benefits	Frequency (%)
It gives children the best start to life	338 (91.4)
Learning of skills and information that can help protect children from exploitation like child labour	310 (83.8)
Enhances economic development by increasing literacy rate	256 (69.2)
It promotes healthier children and families	241 (65.1)
Reduces maternal death	236 (63.8)
Educating children about HIV/AIDS thus reducing its prevalence	95 (25.7)
Promoting the standard of living in the family by making it easier for the female folks to be employed	28 (7.6)
Producing more female leaders for the country	20 (5.4)
Reduction of early pregnancy	20 (5.4)

Table 4: Parents' responses on school enrollment age for children

Age for school enrollment in years	Male children	Female children
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
1	3 (0.8)	3 (0.8)
2	116 (31.4)	111 (30.0)
2.5	11 (3.0)	6 (1.6)
3	146 (39.5)	138 (37.3)
4	24 (6.5)	41 (11.1)
5	54 (14.6)	53 (14.3)
6	5 (1.4)	7 (1.9)
7	3 (0.8)	-
8	1 (0.3)	2 (0.5)
9	2 (0.5)	2 (0.5)
10	-	1 (0.3)
12	-	1 (0.3)
Undecided	5 (1.4)	5 (1.4)
Total	370 (100)	370 (100)

Out of the 370 respondents, 354 (95.7%) think it is important for children to attend school regularly. Five responsibilities of parents toward their children were identified by the respondents including ensuring regular attendance of the child in school (352, 95.1%); ensuring enrollment of the child in school (344, 93%); making sure that the child does his or her homework (238, 64.3%); meeting the teacher regularly to understand the child's progress (212, 57.3%) and ensuring regular attendance of the teachers (200, 54.1%).

Majority (86.2%) of respondents also said that they will take both male and female education seriously, 42 (11.4%) said that they will take only the male education seriously while just 5 (1.4%) said that they will take only the female education seriously. Two (0.5%) respondents said that they will take neither the male or female education seriously and 2 (0.5%) were undecided.

The results from the awareness of respondents about programs related to girl-child education showed that 87% of respondents are aware of Universal Basic Education, 65.7% are aware of Millennium Development Goals, 31.9% are aware of Dakar Goals and 30.5% have heard of A World Fit for Children Goals.

The school enrollment pattern of respondents' children is as shown on table 5. By calculation, female children constituted 69.5% of children that dropped out of schools.

Thirty-two (8.6%) respondents said their female children of school age had dropped out of school. Allowing for multiple responses among these respondents, the reasons given for the drop out were as follows: Lack of money (29; 90.4%), to enable them run errands for their parents (10; 31.3%), due to early marriage (3; 9.4%), truancy in school (1; 3.1%) and as a result of early pregnancy (1; 3.1%).

Table 5: School enrollment pattern of respondents' children

Sex of children	Number of children still in primary school (%)	Number that have completed primary education (%)	Number that have dropped out of primary school (%)	Total number of children (%)
Male	354 (38.1)	551 (59.2)	25 (2.7)	930 (100)
Female	298 (42.6)	344 (49.2)	57 (8.2)	699 (100)
Total	652 (40.0)	895 (55.0)	82 (5.0)	1629(100)

Majority (295; 82.6%) of respondents said that their female children were always present in school and 23 (6.4%) of them said the female children absent themselves from school less than twice a week.

Also, majority (318; 86%) of the parents intend to educate their female children up to tertiary level, 36 (9.7%) up to secondary level, 4 (1.1%) up to primary level. While 2 (0.5%) of them said they do not intend to educate their female children and 10 (2.7%) parents were undecided.

Three hundred and twenty five (87.8%) of respondents said they were able to pay their children school fees regularly while 45 (12.2%) said they were not.

Allowing for multiple responses among the 180 (48.6%) of respondents who said their female children were involved in fetching water for the household, 114 (63.3%) of them engage their female children after school hours, 110 (61.1%) engage their children before school hours and only 6 (3.3%) of them engage their female children in fetching water during school hours.

Similarly, allowing for multiple responses among 91 (24.6%) parents who said they engage their female children in hawking activities, 82 (90.1%) of them engage them after school hours, 20 (22%) engage them before school hours and 5 (5.5%) engage them during school hours.

IV. DISCUSSION

A total of 185 male parents and 185 female parents were randomly selected using multistage sampling technique from Okene Local Government Area of Kogi State which will enable comparison of results obtained from the male parents with the female parents. The true mean of respondents' age was 45.7 years. Their age ranges from 21 years to 75 years. This gave opportunity to sample opinions across both young and old parents.

All the respondents had children of school age so as to examine the present primary school enrollment pattern among the respondents which include primary school completion and drop out among their children. About half of parents in this study had tertiary education and only 6% had no form of education at all. This shows that most of the respondents are well educated. The respondents' perception on girl-child education was generally high. Most (98.6%) of them said they are aware that education is a child's right. Also, 358 (96.8%) of respondents

think that educating a female child is important. This result has a higher value when compared to similar study carried out in North east Karnataka where only 65% of the respondents felt it is important to educate a girl child [11].

The respondents recognized early marriage among females, poverty among household and pregnancy among girls of school ages as leading factors militating against girl child education. This is in conformity with UNICEF and UNESCO report which has also identified these factors as leading causes of low girl child education in Nigeria [7][12][13]. A study involving online discussion with respondents also shows that household poverty is the major factor militating against girl-child education [14]. Only few (20.3%) of respondents in this study perceived gender discrimination as a factor preventing girl child education. Their positive perception towards girl child education may be the reason why most of them think that gender discrimination is not a factor preventing girl child education since almost all the male and female respondents think that educating a girl child is important.

Result from this study shows that majority of respondents identified two main benefits of girl child education which are: giving children the best start to life and learning of skills and information that can help protect children from exploitation. More than half of the respondents also identified enhancement of economic development; promoting healthier children and families and reduction of maternal death as benefits of girl child education. Understanding the benefits of a particular issue may affect a person's perception on that issue. The respondents understanding on some of these benefits may have influenced their positive perception towards girl child education. Similar study in North east Karnataka revealed that 53% and 15% of respondents said benefits of education are increase knowledge level and better future for the child respectively [11].

The attitude of respondents as regards school enrollment age for children showed that the ages chosen by most parents for both male and female children fell into the same range of between the ages two and five. This study shows that most parents believed in enrolling children in school early in life which is a positive attitude. Parents' view on enrollment age for boys was very similar to that of girl-child which probably indicates little or no gender discrimination when it comes to enrollment of the children as par primary level. Ages two and three may however be considered too early to enroll a child in primary school as the usual age for primary school enrollment is between five and six years. Respondents may have chosen such early age for pre-primary education enrollment which is very common in the Nigerian society where most children spend one or two years in Nursery schools before being drifted into primary schools.

Majority (86%) of the respondents in this study also intends to educate their female children up to the tertiary level. This is a positive attitude towards accomplishing the Millennium Development Goal associated with girl-child education. The level of education of an individual generally broadens his knowledge and understanding towards many issues which include the importance of education.

Over 90% of parents sampled in this study identified regular attendance of the child in school and enrollment of the child in school as primary responsibilities of the parents. More than half

of the respondents also agreed that the responsibilities of parents toward the child also include making sure that the child does his or her homework, meeting the teacher regularly to understand their child's progress and monitoring regular attendance of teacher to ensure that their children get the best at school. Similar study in North Karnataka revealed similar result where 85% of respondents said that enrolment of a child in school was the responsibility of the parent, 84% said that parents should ensure that children should attend school regularly, 71% said parents should meet teacher regularly to understand the progress of their child and 65% of them agreed that parents should ensure that their children do their homework [11]. Thus, the respondents in both studies seem to see the role of the parents in learning and education in the right perspective. These are also positive indicators towards prompt achievement of the Millennium Development Goal relating to girl child education.

Majority (86.7%) of parents questioned in this study said that they will take both male and female education seriously. Few (11.4%) of them however said that they will take male child education more seriously than female education. This attitude will enhance the literacy rate in the country which in turns enhances awareness on many health related issues that can promote healthy living.

Over 70% of respondents interviewed in this study were aware of UNICEF, UNESCO and Universal Basic Education (UBE). This shows that the level of awareness in this regard is not a problem among the respondents and therefore the aims of these organizations will not be new to them. However, awareness of Dakar goals and A World Fit for Children goals was very low among the respondents. Only about 30% were aware.

To determine the school enrollment pattern among respondents, questions were asked on their children's primary education completion and school dropout (table 5). The percentage of respondents' male children who have completed primary education outweighs that of female children (59.2% for boys and 49.2% for girls). Though the percentage of female drop out from primary school seem small (8.2%) but when compared to the percentage of drop outs for boys (2.7%), it is observed that there is still a greater lag in girl child primary school completion than boys. When asked why the girls dropped out of school, reasons given by majority of respondents were due to lack of money and to enable the female children run errands for their parents. Household poverty and need for the girl to work at home has also been identified as factors contributing to drop outs of girls in school in related studies [14][15]. If these factors are not addressed, the problem of lag in school completion will continue to be an issue to contend with. When this result was also compared with similar studies conducted in urban area of Nigeria where it was found that the probability of drop out among girls is 23% and 12% for boys [16]; values stated by UNICEF as being the average of boys and girls enrollment for developing countries like Nigeria (0.92 for boys and 0.82 for girls) [8]; and another studies that stated that the average primary net enrollment for north central Nigeria as being 72.1% [17], it could generally be stated that the enrollment pattern of both boys and girls among the respondents in this study are better. This may be as a result of their good perception and attitudes towards girl child education as earlier stated. They are also much better when compared to a

state like Sokoto, Nigeria where it is estimated that only 15% of girls and 59% of boys are enrolled in primary education [7].

As regards school absenteeism, over 80% of respondents said their female children are always present in school. This shows that a good number of the respondents monitor their children as regards school attendance. This is not surprising since majority of respondents recognized regular attendance of the child in school as the responsibility of the parents.

Though 325 (87.9%) of respondents said they are able to pay their children school fees regularly, unemployment among some respondents may be the reason why the remaining are unable to pay their children's school fees. Unemployment has been a leading reason why people are living below poverty line in Nigeria. Poverty however has been identified as a major factor militating against girl-child education both by respondents in this study and other related literatures [7]. The inability of the parents to pay school fees may also be the cause of the child school drop outs among female children of some of the respondents. Statistics shows that enrollment of children in school doubled or tripled in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi after these countries abolished school fees [13]. This also goes to show that if parents are relieved of the burden of paying of school fees, the enrollment of girl-child in school may increase.

More than half (50.4%) of parents that responded to the question pertaining to whether they involve their female children in search for water or not said they do involve their female children in fetching water. Of this number, 63.3% and 61.1% of them said they engage their children in water fetching after and before school hours respectively. A few (3.3%) said they engage them during school. Involvement of these children in search for water before and during school hours may have a negative impact on the children's education. Those that are involved during school hours will miss their lessons in school while those that are involved before school hours may become worn out before going to school and may lead to loss of concentration in class. Poverty may influence the kind of place an individual inhabits. Such places may lack basic amenities like portable water. Thus, this may force parents to involve their children especially female children for water search which may be far from their homes.

Only 25.5% of respondents engage their female children in hawking activities. Most (90.1%) of them involve them after school hours. Twenty-two percent of parents involve them before school hours and only 5.5% of them involve them during school hours. This study show that poverty level among unemployed involving the female children in hawking may be a source of extra fund for them which may enable them cater for the family needs.

V. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that almost all the respondents were aware that education is a child right. Their perception towards girl-child education was also very good with almost all respondents saying that educating a girl child is important. The three most ranked factors by respondents as those militating against girl-child education were early marriage among females, poverty among household and pregnancy among girls of school age while the two leading benefits of girl child education recognized by

respondents included giving the female children the best start to life and protecting the girl-child from exploitation like child labour.

This study also reveals that respondents' attitude towards girl-child education was also good. Most respondents feel that a girl-child should be enrolled early enough as majority of them chose between ages two and four as the best for the enrollment of a girl child. The proportions of school enrollment for male and female children of the respondents were very high but with more drop outs among the female children than the males. The respondents' reason for female drop out of school was because of lack of money.

Introduction and implementation of adult education among the uneducated parents will enhance better understanding of the relevance of girl-child education. Poverty among household should be addressed. Extra assistance such as free school meal or stipends linked to regular attendance helps poor families keep girls in school for longer. In addition, education at primary and secondary levels should be made free. Finally, there is need to conduct similar study in order to compare response and possible review strategy towards prompt attainment of the Millennium Development Goal related to girl-child education.

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