

FACTORS INFLUENCING GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN EBONYI STATE OF NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS OF MALE-PARENTAL ATTITUDE

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Abstract

This study examined the factors influencing girl-child education in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design of quantitative paradigm. The views of 300 male respondents were selected randomly using simple random sampling technique of lucky-dip without replacement. This was considered adequate, due to the homogeneous nature of the population. A ten (10) test items with four (4) Likert summative scale of 'Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) was used to measure the attitudes of respondents to indicate their degree of approval or disapproval which consists of various statements pertaining to girl-child education. The main instrument for data collection was questionnaire administered in a form of interview conducted in their native dialect (interpreted in English language). Descriptive statistical tools were employed and data were analyzed using weighted mean. Results of the findings revealed that male parental attitudinal factors greatly influence girl-child education in Ebonyi state. Based on the findings, recommendations which includes the government enacting and implementing the law that prohibit gender inequality and encouraging female enrolment in school among others, were made and conclusions drawn.

Background of the Study

Girl-Child education in some parts of South-East geo-political zone, notably Ebonyi State is still in a deplorable condition. Statistics have shown that some Local Government Areas in Ebonyi State such as Ohozara, Ivo, Ohaukwu, Izzi, Ezza to mention but a few, record girls' school completion rates as low as 6.5%. Similarly, the net enrolment rates for girls into secondary school by 2014 were 20% (Federal Ministry of Education FME, 2015).

Academic Scholarship

Gender equality according to UNESCO (2005) does not mean that the male and female folks should be exactly the same; rather it means that men and women should be equally valued by the society regardless of their gender differences. They should be seen as equal partners anywhere they find themselves. This however is one of the goals of Education for All Programme launched by the Federal Government in 2004, through the Universal Basic Education (UBE). It is therefore not surprising that gender equality and women empowerment is one of the eight (8) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2000. However, the extent of inequality and discrimination among gender in Nigerian society vary considerably across culture, religions and society.

Male attitudinal factors affecting girls' education may probably include; cost of education, religious misconception, and illiteracy and the cultural beliefs or norms of the people among others. In addition to the aforementioned factors, the family's income or how many brothers and sisters a girl-child has, the size of the family will have a considerable influence in the direction of decision, to allow boys attend western education instead of the girls (Asare, 2009). Denying the girl-child access to education implies making her a dysfunctional member of the society.

Statement of the Problem

It is on record that Nigeria has had a National Policy on Education (NPE) since 1981, which has been reviewed severally. Regrettably, it has not been fully implemented effectively and efficiently probably, due to insufficient political will, rapid population growth, and a long period of undemocratic governance and poor management of the nation's available scarce resources. Even though there is a policy of free education in Ebonyi State, data suggest that there are still significant disparities between girls and boys education.

Furthermore there is a glaring gender inequality in this part of the country that it has become a socio-political, economic and educational discourse among scholars and academics. This disheartening situation has raised serious issues bothering on the factors influencing girl-child education in Ebonyi State and the implications of male parental attitude towards it. To achieve this objective, the study is aptly posed in a question form; to what extent does male parental attitude influence girl-child education in Ebonyi State?

Research Questions

To guide the study, one research question was formulated:

- What are the contributing factors responsible for the negative male-parental attitude to girl-child education in Ohozara L.G.A of Ebonyi state, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

- There is no significant difference on the rating of negative male-parental attitudinal factors to girl-child education in Ohozara L.G.A of Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Framework

A girl-child is a female that falls below the age of maturity. Dashen (2004) posits that the girl-child is understood to fall under 18 years of age. According to him, it is the formative year which coincides with the primary and secondary education stages. The National Child Welfare Policy (1989) as cited by Nduru (2013) opines the girl child as person below 14 years of age. Offorma (2008) defines the girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. This period is made up of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. The girl-child is seen as a young female person, who would eventually grow into a woman and marry. She is conditioned to look after the young ones, the home and the kitchen. She is taught to be obedient and to internalize the notion that she is someone's property and responsibility. She is her parent's property and responsibility at childhood and her husband's in adulthood.

The gender apartheid places the girl-child in a disadvantaged position. Her potentials are suppressed and self actualization is not achieved. Education is the process of providing information to a person to help him or her develop mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically (Offorma, 2008). Education is one of the fundamental rights of individuals. Article 26 of the universal declaration of human rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as cited by Nwangwu (2006), stipulated that: Everyone has the right to education. This shall be made free in the elementary and primary stages, elementary. Education shall be made compulsory while technical and professional education shall be made generally available. Higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit and Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on three theories;

- (a) Functionalist Perspective,

- (b) Liberal Perspective and
- (c) Conflict Views on Education.

- **Functionalist Perspective:**

According to Durkheim, the French sociologist, the society can exist only if there exist among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity of which education perpetuates and reinforces by fixing on the child from the beginning the essential similarities which life demands. Without these essential similarities, cooperation, social solidarity and social life will be impossible. Ocho (2015) argues that to become attached to the society the child must feel in something that is real, alive and power which dominates the person which he also owes the best part of himself. Ocho further said that in complex industrial societies the high school serves a function which cannot be provided either by the family or peer groups. Durkheim equates education with society in miniature, a model for social system. In the school, the child interacts with other members of the school community in-terms of fixed set of rules. Ocho observes that is by observing the school rules that a child learn how to develop the habits of self-control and restrain himself. Similarly, he argues that education teaches the individual specific skills necessary for his future occupation. This function is particularly important in industrial society with its increasingly complex and specialized division of labour. Thus school transmits both general values, which provide the necessary diversity for social survival, and specific skills, which provide the necessary diversity for social cooperation of which a girl-child needs.

- **Liberal Perspective:**

The liberalist argues that education fosters personal development and self-fulfillment which encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional and spiritual talents to the full. By providing free education gives everyone an equal opportunity for developing these capacities and talents. According to the liberal perspectives, academic credentials are awarded on merit in a system of fair competition and in the same way jobs are awarded on merit and there is a strong relationship between educational qualifications and occupation status. The liberalist are of the view that the expansion of education will reduce gender inequality in society particularly as the educational attainment of members of the working class rises, their bargaining position in the market will improve and as a result their income will rise.

• **Conflict Views:**

The conflict theorists stress that schools sort pupils according to social class background. Wallace and Alison (2009) is of the view that educational system helps certain poor children to move into middle class professional positions and provides most disadvantaged children the same educational opportunities afforded by children of the affluent. Schools tend to preserve social class and gender inequalities in each new generation.

Empirical Framework

In the traditional Nigerian society, there exists the belief that women are second class citizens (Bakari, 2011). A woman is considered as a man's property or pleasure object. She is also considered as a 'machine' meant for producing children. This situation has resulted in unfair treatment of women especially with regards to education. The average rural Nigerian parent would rather invest in the education of the son rather than the daughter (Tahir, 2009).

According to Kenneth (2013) women were thus seen as nurturers and mainly providing support for men who worked to provide for the family. Bakari (2011) informed that women were perceived physically weaker, less capable and requiring the protection and guidance of men. These traditional beliefs have been found to foster negative attitudes, which limit the male parents support toward educating the girl-child which has grave consequences for both the individual and the society at large.

Early marriage is common in this region and girls are often married shortly after puberty a period when most are expected to transit to secondary school (Tahir, 2009). This high rate of early marriage not only deprives them from pursuing their education but it also linked to early sexual initiation and early exposure to reproductive risk and other related health and social problems like divorce, broken homes which by extension has its attendant problems on society Offorma (2008). Education in Ebonyi state is in a poor shape and statistics shows that many girls are not enrolled in school. The global figure for out of school children is estimated at 122 million of which 66 million are girls with over 80 percent of these girls living in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria (Nwangwu, 2006).

Methodology

Research Design:

The study adopted a descriptive survey design of quantitative paradigm. The use of this design in this study involved collecting data from sampled male parents on their attitudinal factors influencing girl-child education in Ebonyi State.

Area of the Study:

This study was carried out in Ohozara Local Government Area which is one of the thirteen (13) L.G.As in Ebonyi State. The choice of the area was due to the perceived poor enrolment of girl-child in school.

Population of the Study:

The population for the study consisted of 650 male parents in Ohozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Sample Size and Sampling Methods:

A sample of three hundred (300) male respondents was drawn from Ohozara LGA in Ebonyi State using simple random sampling technique of lucky-dip without replacement. This ensured that the sample have equal chances of being selected. The sample size was considered adequate due to the homogeneous nature of the population.

Instrument for Data Collection:

Instrument for data collection consisted of questionnaire titled male parental attitudinal factors influencing girl-child education in Ebonyi State. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A comprised 2 open-ended questions that elicited background information on the respondents' status. Section B comprised of ten (10) items questions.

Validation of the Instrument:

The instrument was validated by experts in psychology and sociology as well as measurements and evaluation.

Reliability of the Instrument:

Reliability was established by administering the test instrument on respondents in Anam in Anambra West Local Government Area of Anambra State which has the same social background with the area of the study. The results obtained were closely related.

Method of Data Administration and Collection:

Two research assistants, mainly literate people from Ohozara (who are familiar with the norms and values of the respondents) assisted the researcher in the face-to-face administration and collection of data for the study. All the questionnaires were collected.

Data Analysis:

The data collected was organized and completed around the research questions, using summative rating scale otherwise called ‘weighted mean.’ The mean values of the four responses were determined by dividing the summation of the frequency of responses with the summation of the scale used.

Mean values (X)= $\frac{\sum fx}{\sum x}$

Where fx = total sum of scores,

x= total number of rating scales,

$x = 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 10$

$x = 10/4 = 2.50$

Therefore a mean = or > 2.50 is in agreement for the questionnaire items while the mean values < 2.50 shows disagreement. Descriptive statistical tools were employed in the analysis and the data were analyzed using mean.

Data Analysis and Results:

Research Question:

- What are the contributing factors responsible for the negative male-parental attitude to girl-child education in Ohozara L.G.A of Ebonyi state, Nigeria?

S/N	ITEMS	VGE	GE	LE	VLE	X	Decision
1.	Poverty (low income level)	230	50	15	05	3.68	Agree
2.	Preference of male over female child	245	39	09	07	3.74	agree
3.	Size of the family	204	76	11	04	3.57	Agree
4.	Educational background (illiteracy)	221	68	06	05	3.68	Agree
5.	Religious misconception	77	43	100	80	2.39	Disagree
6.	Type of marriage (polygamy or monogamy)	200	72	15	13	3.53	Agree
7.	Occupation	155	125	08	12	3.77	Agree
8.	Place of residence	204	76	11	04	3.57	Agree
9.	Cultural belief/ norms	245	39	09	07	3.74	Agree
10.	Cost of Education	267	23	03	07	3.83	Agree

Results and Discussion:

The study shows the male parental prevalent attitudinal factors influencing girl-child education in Ohozara L.G.A of Ebonyi state. From the table above it was observed from item 1 and 2 that the poverty (low income level) of the male parent and the preference of male over the female child to a Very Great Extent (230) and (245) respectively, affects the educational attainment of girl-child in Ohozara LGA of Ebonyi state. Very few respondents (05) and (07) respectively, objected to the statement. This is probably because, a poverty stricken family who finds it difficult to meet up with the family's needs would prefer the male child to enroll in school rather than the female whom they believe will carry the family's name, while the woman is seen as another person's property and a second class citizen. This is in agreement with the opinion of Bakari (2011).

Item 3, 4 and 6 which says that size of family (204), educational background (illiteracy) (221) and type of marriage (polygamy or monogamy) (200) respectively are one of the factors influencing girl-child education in Ohozara LGA of Ebonyi State. Few respondents (04), (05) and (13) respectively, stated otherwise. This implies that as the family size grows probably due to polygamous nature, the female may be asked to stay out of school as they are 'another man's (husband's) responsibility'. This issue may be heightened by the illiteracy state of the male parents.

Occupation of parents (155), place of residence (204), cultural belief (245) and cost of education (267) which represents items 7, 8, 9 and 10 respectively are to a Great Extent an influencing factor to the girl-child education in Ohozara LGA of Ebonyi state. This also implies that the type of occupation of the male parent coupled with the environment where they dwell may prompt the girl-child to be out of school. This can be as a result of cultural belief that the place of the women is in the kitchen and they are child-bearing machine. This is in line with the view of Tahir (2009) which says that a woman is considered as a man's property or pleasure object and a machine meant for producing children. The high cost of education in Nigeria to a Great Extent hinder female enrolment as they may be subjected to hawking or fending for the family. Few respondents (12), (04), (07) and (07) respectively, objected.

Item 5 which says that religious misconception recorded a value, different from the rest which was below the mean value of 2.50 and not in agreement. This could have been a strong factor in the north where the teaching of the Holy Quran suggests that once a girl has seen her first monthly flow in her father's house, the second one should be in her husband's home (Sani, 2006).

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that when it comes to education, some parents are very primitive on choosing what is right for their children. With all the civilization in the world, some parents still prevent their female children from going to school. Although many have observed that this practice is peculiar to some Local Government Areas in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, it is actually a nationwide phenomenon in Nigeria. The study showed that (poverty) low income level of the male parent, type of marriage (polygamy or monogamy), occupation, place of residence, cost of education, size of family, preference of male over female child and cultural belief are some of the male parental attitudinal factors that influence girl-child education in Ohozara LGA in Ebonyi state.

Recommendations

Having investigated some of the male parental attitudinal factors that influence the girl-child education in Ohozara LGA in Ebonyi state, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Parents should endeavor to train their female children in school without the notion that they are second class citizens, or a man's property or pleasure object and a baby factory. They should also invest on their daughters and not only on their sons.
2. Government should pass a law prohibiting the practice of early marriage among girl-child which would keep them out of school.
3. Government should ensure that the law that encourage gender equality are implemented to the letter and any one that violets that law (gender discrimination) is made to face the wrath of the law.
4. The public should ensure that equal opportunities are given to both genders as the female folks may turn out to be the bread winner of the family or a voice to reckon with, as seen in the case of late Professor Dora Akunyili, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to mention but a few.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

This study's concern was restricted to access for education by the girl-child; it did not take into consideration the other crucial issues in girl-child education like retention and dropout, equity, enrolment, quality and achievement in school subjects. It is narrowed to Ohozara L.G.A of Ebonyi State and was constrained by finance and time. Further studies should take these short comings into account.

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