
GIRL CHILD EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF AKWA IBOM STATE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate the girl child education and socio-economic growth in Nigeria using Akwa Ibom State as a case study. In almost all the communities in Nigeria the girl child faces a number of disadvantages relative to the boys. There have been persistent hues and cries over the years for the emancipation of women from the shackles of male domination and the Nigerian girl-child has been suppressed by gender biased stereotypes and prejudice arising from culture, religion and political settings. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. The survey research method and the liberal feminist theory of gender inequality by Dugbazab, were adopted. The study employed structured and non-structured questionnaire which was administered to six hundred (600) respondents using stratified simple random sampling technique to select proportionately six (6) communities in three (3) senatorial districts (Uyo, Ikot Ekpene and Eket). Simple percentage and chi-square test was used for analysis. Findings among others show that, there is high level of gender disparity in education; and the culture of the people, illiteracy and the rate of poverty impede the girl-child education. The study agrees that socio-economic growth needs education to back it up. The study recommends among others, that government and other stakeholders in women affairs should strive to create conducive, enabling, socio-political and economic conditions which will discourage societal preference for male children and the traditional belief that the position of women is in the kitchen. That the counselors in the various states of the country should counsel young girls on attitudinal change, assertive social skills, self-esteem concept and interest among others. Also the federal, state and local governments should provide free, compulsory primary and secondary education in all the villages of the 774 local government areas in Nigeria by building more standard schools, well-staffed and equipped to provide quality education so that the children can compete favourably with their counterparts from the cities.

Keywords: *Girl Child Education, Socio-economic Growth, Education, Female Children and Formal Education.*

Introduction

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to 18 years of age. During this period, the young girl is totally under the care of adult who may be parents, guardians or older siblings. It is also a period when the girl-child is malleable, builds and develops her personality and character. She is very dependent on others on who she models her behaviour, through observation, repetition and imitation. Her physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional developments start and progress to get to the peak at the young adult stage (Sutherland. 2001).

The development of any society would be grossly lopsided if the girl-child is not given quality education. Education in any normal society is accepted as an instrument to power, prestige, survival, greatness and advancement for men and women. However, Osinulu (1994), lamented that the girl-child is discriminated against in terms of education and given out in marriage early thereby denying the girl-child the required

competences for community development. According to Osinulu (1994), and Akinpelu (2000) education is the process of providing information to an inexperienced person to help the individual develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society (Ocho, 2005). It is a process through which the young acquire knowledge and realize their potentials and use them for self-actualization. It enables the girl-child to be useful to herself and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. Education is implicitly a part of culture as it is a life-long learning process that enables a person, irrespective of age to understand the relationship between the environment and his or her peculiar circumstances. Education, whether formal, informal or non- formal, helps towards the development of a complete balanced and rational personality. Consequently, the lack of education will have negative influences on the individual, family and society at large (Ekong, 2008).

According to UNICEF (2007), a woman's literacy also increases productivity and self-employment in the informal sector. For example, the educational level of rural women is linked to increased productivity in agriculture. Literacy assists people to acquire skills and knowledge that help to facilitate better use of natural resources and other agricultural inputs and thereby increasing their productivity. Thus, the girl-child as an active participant in all stages of the productive chain, i.e. hoeing, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting and threshing of grains, storage and distribution of goods needs to be educated to increase productivity and income. It can be noted that purposeful plans of action led to an increase in the number of girls in schools after 1990. While more boys than girls were enrolled in 1991 with a difference of 138,000, by 1998, the difference was only 69,400. At the pan-African Conference held at Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in March and April 1993 (three decades after the UN Declaration of the 1960s) it was observed that Nigeria was still lagging behind other regions of the world in female access to education. It was also noted that gender disparity existed in education and that there was need to identify and eliminate all policies that hindered girls' full participation in education (UNESCO, 2010).

Meaning of Girl-child Education

The education of the girl-child has a very long history around the world. Educating women was earlier limited to the informal system of education which is education acquired in the family. The informal method of educating women was the major system of acquiring knowledge which women were exposed to for a very long time. According to Barry (2013), women education dates back to the 18th century in America where women were taught how to handle household chores. Women education during this period was therefore fashioned towards assisting the girl-child become a wife material and manage her home properly after marriage.

Today, the education of women has gone beyond the task of being home managers to that of managing small and large business organizations. Women now acquire formal education in order to assist them to contribute effectively to the management of various sectors of the society. Since women are now exposed to the same learning environment available to their male counterpart, they have been empowered to contribute equally to the advancement of the society. Similarly, opinion, Wikipedia (n.d.) noted that women education vis-à-vis female education is the provision of primary, secondary, tertiary and health education specifically for females. It refer to all platform of education established to provide women with equal opportunity and access to formal education just like their male counterpart. This means that education of women must be tailored to meet their societal and health needs. Baha (2012), concurred with this view when he stated that women education is an instrument for providing sustainable economic development. It is an avenue for providing formal education to female citizens in the society by equipping

them with the skills and abilities needed to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of themselves and the nation. Women education is therefore provided at all levels of the educational sector specifically for women in order to equip them with the required knowledge to become empowered and contribute to self and societal development.

Concept of Socio-economic Growth

Literarily, development has been defined as a qualitative increase in the output of a nation from all productive sectors of the economy. It is a state in which the various sectors of the economy are operating at full capacity to provide a better life for the citizens. However, socio-economic growth goes beyond the qualitative and quantitative increase in output from all sectors of the economy. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) socio-economic has to do with human development in which resources are used to meet human needs while ensuring the sustainability of natural systems and the environment, so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. Socio-economic growth, therefore, goes beyond meeting the immediate needs of the present generation. It also deals with securing a comfortable future for the future generation. On their part, the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD) (2013), defined socio-economic growth as increase or development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development is sustainable when the level of qualitative and quantitative output from the various sectors of the economy is able to meet the needs of the present and future generation respectively. Socio-economic growth can similarly be said to be development that has maximum importance to both the present and future generations according to their needs.

Economic Growth and Girl-Child Education

According to Ferguson and Dickens (2003), Socio-economic growth seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. It starts from the fact that within any community there is a wealth of knowledge, experience and creativity which can be harnessed and channeled into four collective actions to achieve the community's desired goals. Thus, education can rightly be said to be the key to effective participation in economic growth. Marshal (2003), states that women make up more than half of the Nigerian population, and they have been known to have contributed in many ways to the development of the society. Hence, for the girl-child to face the challenges of our time, full participation requires that she has access to the benefits of formal and informal education to the same level, and of the same quality as that given to the men. He stressed that it is the only way the girl-child can contribute maximally to the economic development of her community and Nigeria at large. In support of this, Schacter (2010), argued that children's intelligence could be significantly influenced by environmental changes and that early childhood was a key to improving later performances in various aspects of the individual's life. It is in the light of the foregoing that Stronquist (2000), stressed that "...girl-child education involves equipping girls who later grow up to women with the knowledge, abilities and mental powers with which they will be useful to themselves, the family and the society. However, Bolaji (2007), noted that there is still gender inequality in terms of accessibility to education in many parts of Nigeria particularly States like Katsina, Kano, Bauchi, and Jigawa, Akwa Ibom, etc. In these places, many girls are not sent to school and among those sent to school, many drop out early. Secondly, there is the issue of early marriage which conflicts with educational programmes. Bolaji (2007) noted that early marriage has been institutionalized in many parts of Nigeria especially in Kano, Kastina, Sokoto, Bauchi and Kaduna. It also used to be the case among the Ibos, Ibibios and Urhohos, but with Western education, the practice has abated but not completely eradicated. Girls are given out in marriage for many reasons. It is obvious from the above study that most girls married off, were

still physically immature for pregnancy. In some parts of Nigeria, it is a known fact that the input of the girl-child into the family income is so high that it becomes economically unwise to allow such a child to go to school. Examples of such inputs include generating income by way of hawking food items. The girl-child also helps with the household chores and look after the younger ones which relieves the parents of employing paid house helps. This therefore reduces the financial burden on the family (Ballara, 2002). In addition, poverty compels many parents to marry off their daughters to wealthy men instead of sending them to school. This is because education is so expensive that parents do not consider the returns for girls' education. Instead, parents would rather prefer the returns of marriage in terms of bride prize. Many parents believe that when girls are educated, the benefits go to their family of procreation (husband's family) instead of the family of orientation (biological family). To Ballara (2002), the importance of the girl-child education cannot be over-emphasized in any society, since they (female children), constitute more than half of the population in most societies their education is vital to any sustainable development. With the acquisition of skills, the girl child in adulthood contributes a lot to societal development. A girl's education affords her the opportunity to take advantage of family planning facilities which result in birth of fewer children and less social and economic burdens on families and society in general.

Factors That Inhibit Girl-child Education in Nigeria

As earlier posited, women play a significant role in sustaining the efficiency of the various sectors of the country. The economic, political, social and religious sectors of the economy will perform better when women are involved in managing the affairs of the various sectors of the economy. This will assist the nation in achieving quicker and better national objectives. However, there are so many factors that have hindered the education of women in order to empower them to contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development of the nation. Some of these factors include but are not limited to the following:

Cultural Beliefs: The African culture over the years has relegated the position of women to that of a home tender. This belief system has been upheld by various societies and has contributed to the slow progress recorded by women both nationally and internationally. According to Shinaba (2008), cultural beliefs in the past suggest that training a woman was just a waste of time and resources. This has contributed to the unwillingness of parents, communities and the nation at large to provide an enabling environment for female education to thrive. Based on the little attention given to women education due to various cultural beliefs in our society, women have been deprived the opportunity for the acquisition of formal education at all levels. This has resulted in a wide disparity between the number of males and females who are undergoing various programmes in the various educational institutions across the country.

Low Self-Esteem: According to Glover (2000), most female have failed to pick up science and technology related tasks even though they possess the needed intellectual ability. They have deliberately shied away from responsibilities that they also have the capacity to execute. Female all over the country have passionately embraced the position of a home tender which society has relinquished to them. Very few female citizens are willing to rise up and compete with the men in areas where they (the females) have comparative advantage. This is due to the low self- esteem that has been developed by them. Most women have viewed themselves as being incapacitated even in activities where they would have performed well due to fear of failure. Women believe that they do not have the strength, intellect and political will that the men possess and as such it becomes unnecessary to compete with them. This has made most women to ignore the need to further their education as they view it as a waste of time and other precious resources.

Cost of Education: The decline in economic activities since the early 1980s has made education a luxury to many Nigerians, especially those in rural areas. Because Nigerian parents are known to invest in children

according to sex, birth order or natural endowments, girls and boys are not exact substitutes. Often, the family can only afford to send one child to school. Because daughters have assumed responsibilities in the home, she is less likely to be the one to attend school (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Colonial Policies: At the beginning of colonialism and Christianity, rigid ideals about gender perceptions were imposed on the African mind. Thereafter, the woman's role has come to be limited to sexual and commercial labour; satisfying the sexual needs of men, working in the fields, carrying loads, tending babies and preparing food. The disempowering colonial 'ideology of domesticity' as espoused by the practice of housewifization' provided the springboard for women's educational imbalance in parts of Africa. As such, the overall human development in Nigeria is being hindered by this unevenness in educational accessibility across gender categories (UNICEF, 2007)

Insufficient Infrastructures: Infrastructures play a significant role in the provision of quality education in any nation. The availability of appropriate infrastructures such as school library, classrooms, workshops, laboratories, electricity, water supply etc. contributes to effectiveness of the school system. Similarly, women have certain infrastructures that need to be put in place in order for them to learn effectively in the school system. Infrastructures that will boost their entrepreneurial skill, home management skill need to be put in place in order to make schooling interesting to them. Also, there are certain facilities that enable women to learn effectively in any school system. This includes sanitary facilities, home management facilities among others. However, when these infrastructures are not available, meaningful teaching and learning may not take place for them (Nwantabisa, 2012).

Insecurity: The level of insecurity in the nation has affected the educational sector as a whole. However, the worse hit is women who are already marginalized in the past and are unable to defend themselves in the time of crisis and violence. Most parents would prefer their children to attend schools where security is guaranteed. Also, with the increasing level of insecurity in the country. Students both male and female alike have been deprived the privilege of acquiring education of their choice. According to Odehode (2013), insecurity in the north has led to the death of 70 teachers, 100 students with thousands of teachers and students fleeing for safety. This has compounded the problem of inaccessibility of education in the country both for male and female students in the country. Despite the prevalence of the security challenges in the country, the male students have been able to manage the situation better than the female students. More female students have therefore been deprived the opportunity of going to school for fear of insecurity around the country.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment at all levels of education in the country is more pronounced between male teachers and female students. In the same way, the type of job secured by women is dependent on the type of education acquired. Women are therefore exposed the most to sexual harassment both in school and at work. Leathwood (2005), noted that the preference for different job types contributes to sexual enticement in selected job types. With more male teachers in the education sector, there is bound to be an increase in the level of sexual harassment between male teachers and female students than the other way round. This has contributed to the many reasons why most girls especially in the north have been deprived the opportunity of attending formal education as this may serve as an avenue for the married women around them to be exposed to sexual advances from their male teachers. This has contributed to the reasons why some men would prefer their wives to be housekeepers rather than undergo any form of formal education.

The Role of Girl-Child Education to the Socio-economic Growth of Nigeria

There are various ways through which women can contribute to the development of the nation. Based on some of the special qualities possessed by women, a lot can be benefited from them if given the opportunity to be educated. Some of the benefits that can be derived from women education towards a sustainable development are:

Quality Leadership: According to the report of Shinaba (2008), abuse of power, violations of human rights, mismanagement of national resources and under development are the order of the day for the past four decades that men have been in power. Similarly, the period in which men have been in power have been characterized by gross inequality and violence. However, as managers of the home, it is expected that if women are given the opportunity, they will be able to implement their managerial skills in the management of the various sectors of the economy. The quality of leadership that will be provided by women will be such that would be characterized with equality, peace, transparency and protection of human right. All of these qualities are very important in building a stable nation.

Increase in GDP: The World Bank in White (2013), pointed out that if the gap between male and female employment is closed, it would help to increase GDP in America by 9%, Europe by 13% and Japan by 16%. When women are given the opportunity to be educated, it will help to increase the workforce of the nation. Similarly, the activities of women in the various economic sectors of the economy have the potential of contributing to an increased GDP. This is because their contribution will help to augment the effort of their male counterpart in securing a higher GDP.

Building of a Healthy Nation: The health condition of the citizens is one of the factors that determine the lifespan of the masses. In the same way, the lifespan of the citizens is one of the factors that determine the level of development. Orji (2011), noted that girl education vis-à-vis women education stands as one of the potent tools for reducing girls' vulnerability. A healthy nation has also been linked to a wealthy nation. Similarly Kingdon (2002), noted that doubling the female secondary school enrolment ratio from 19% to 38% in 1975 helped to reduce infant deaths in 1985 by 64%. The education of women is therefore closely related to raising a healthy generation that would be empowered to contribute significantly to national development. Women in the society are usually known for their cleanliness and have the capacity of building a healthy nation.

Reduced Dependency Rate: The education of women is one of the ways of reducing the level of dependency in the nation. The empowerment of women through education will assist in reducing the pressure on economic resources in the country. This will help to sustain the economic resources in the country towards the path of development. Similarly, empowering women through education would also enable them to become self-sufficient individuals. They would be equipped to learn and develop various means by which they can meet up with personal and societal needs. This will help to reduce the pressure on national resources and also reduce dependency level on their sponsor (UNICEF, 2007).

Resource Management: Women all over the world are known to be better managers than their male counterpart. The prudent management of resources helps to reduce wastage and increase economic benefit from available resources. When women are properly educated, it helps them to put their managerial skill into use and helps them to manage national economic resources for the benefit of all. It is therefore advisable that women should be empowered through formal education on how they can harness their management abilities for the long term benefit of all citizens in the country.

Ways to Improve Girl-child Education in Nigeria

Various educational stakeholders have continued to re-iterate the need to improve on the girl-child education in the country as a way of empowering women in the society. The girl-child education has been linked to a positive relationship with national development. It is therefore needful that women education be given the needed attention in the society. Some of the ways through which women education can be improved in the country include the following:

Ensuring Gender Equality in Admission Process: According to occupational statistics provided by Wikipedia (2013), female workers in some identified professions were as follow: architects 2.4%, quantity surveyors 3.5%, lawyers/jurists 25.4%, lecturers 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists 8.4%, pediatricians 33.3%, and media practitioners 18.3%. This is an indication that the method of admission into various courses in most of the nation's higher institutions is gender sensitive. Most of the tertiary institutions in the country reserve some courses basically for the men against their female counterparts. Some of these courses are areas where women can either perform better or compete favorably with their male counterpart. As a way of improving women education in the country, more women need to be given equal opportunity during admission to study courses of their choices. The method of admission in higher institutions should be gender friendly and give the girl-child the opportunity to acquire higher education in a course and institution of their choice.

Provision of Educational Grants: Although all persons interested in acquiring formal education in the country should be given the opportunity to do so, however, more female students should be given educational grants as a way of encouraging them to further their education to higher levels. In the face of the disparity that already exists in the ratio of boys to girls in most of the educational systems in the country, more female students should be provided with financial support as a way of bridging the differences in education at all levels. Female student can be provided with educational grants that will help them complete their education or provided with financial encouragement in the form of stipends that will assist them to study comfortably in any institution of their choice. This will help to increase the interest of more women to acquire formal education just like their male counterparts.

Proper Legislation: Disparity between the male and female child has been in existence for so long. Various authors have identified the fact that the African tradition naturally places more importance on the male child than on the female child. However, Nasir (2002), noted that the inability of women to acquire education and contribute to the independence of Nigeria also contributes to the slow progress of women education. It is therefore necessary that proper policies be formulated and implemented to protect the female child from cultural and contemporary beliefs. The various arms of government should be ready to stand up and defend the rights of women when such rights are being eroded and abused. When appropriate laws are put in place, it will go a long way in overcoming all barriers that limit the girl-child from acquiring quality education just like other citizens in the country.

Employment of Quality Female Teachers: One of the ways of encouraging more women to acquire formal education is by providing a sufficient number of female teachers in most of the schools across the country. Majority of the schools in the country are occupied by male teachers who may not understand or give the needed attention to the female child to excel in school. Similarly, there are increasing cases of female students being sexually harassed by their male teachers. Most female students need female teachers who would serve as role models to them in the school system. It is therefore needful that more female teachers be employed in the various educational levels in the country' so as to encourage the female child to demand

for and willingly acquire formal education at the various levels (OECD DAC, 2004).

Provision of Appropriate Infrastructures: Women education in the country is so sensitive that it requires the provision of appropriate facilities for it to succeed. Male students are naturally wired to succeed under pressure in meeting life goals including that of education. This is not the case with women. Women require a well-organized environment for them to learn effectively. According to OECD DAC (2004), infrastructures for women education should be able to achieve the following: Increase women's economic opportunities; provide appropriate services to women; Encourage women to take up decision making and leadership roles; Improve girls' and women's access to education and health care; Eliminate discrimination against girls and women. It is through the provision of quality infrastructures that the essence of women education can be achieved. These infrastructures will help women to learn meaningfully and also put the knowledge acquired into productive use.

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal feminist theory is a conceptual orientation that is premised on the understanding that individual ignorance has contributed to gender prejudice. In order to address this prejudice, the affected individual has to take action. Education is therefore seen as a variable that can be used to improve the situation. Liberal feminism is concerned with equal rights and freedom of the individual. Hence, if there should be reform, such reforms should be gradually introduced without radically upsetting the status quo. Liberal feminism has moderate aims, it does not radically challenge the existing values and as such it aims at gradual change in political, economic and social systems (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). Gender disparity has been attributed to a number of factors including culture and the way men and women are associated within the culture. Another factor includes discriminating attitude of individual. All these can be changed through empowerment and education. Generally, liberal feminism calls for gradual reforms through advocacy for equal rights for all, laws and policies that promote equality (Samkang, 2015).

Liberal feminism explains gender inequalities in social and cultural parameters; it seeks to work through the existing system such as law, mobilization and conscientization to effect a gradual change. Its proponents seek to “focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for woman through legislation other and democratic means” (Giddens, 2001). The liberalist argues that education fosters personal development and self-fulfillment it encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional and spiritual talents to the full. The relevance of this theory in education of a girl-child is that government should provide free education for all because free education gives everyone an equal opportunity for developing these capacities and talents. According to the liberal perspectives, academic credential are awarded on merit in a system of fair competition, 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 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.

Testing of Hypotheses and Interpretation

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: Gender inequality has no influence on girl child education in Akwa Ibom State.

H₁: Gender inequality has influence on girl child education in Akwa Ibom State.

To test this assumption, the following table is used:

Table 1.1 Computed Chi-square value λ

Cell	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{O - E^2}{E}$
A	101	88.16	12.84	168.87	1.89
B	85	83.7	1.3	1.69	0.02
C	93	107.14	-14.14	199.94	1.87
D	30	39.82	-9.82	46.43	2.42
E	50	37.8	12.2	148.84	3.94
F	46	48.38	-2.38	5.66	0.12
G	10	15.8	-5.8	33.64	2.13
H	3	15.0	12	144	9.6
I	37	19.2	17.8	316.84	16.5
J	17	14.22	2.78	7.73	0.54
K	12	13.5	-1.5	2.25	0.17
L	16	17.28	-1.28	1.6	0.09
					$\chi^2 = 39.27$

Field Survey, (2019).

Chi Square (χ^2) calculated value = 39.29 degree of freedom = D/f = (No of rows - 1) (No. of column - 1) (R - 1)(C - 1) (3-1)(4-1) 2 x 3 = 6, obtaining the table value of 6 under 0.05 level of significance in Chi-Square table. Chi-Square table value = 12.592.

Conclusion: The calculation above shows that computed χ^2 value of (39.27) is greater than the table value of (12.592), in accordance with the decision rule, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected for the alternate hypothesis (H_1) which states that, Gender inequality tends to influence Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis 2: H_0 : Cultural factors do not hinder girl child education in Akwa Ibom State.

H_1 : Cultural factors act as hindrance to girl child education in Akwa Ibom State.

To test this assumption, the following table is used:

Table 1.2: Computed Chi-square value

Cell	O	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
A	92	80.39	11.61	134.79	1.63
B	79	73.46	5.54	30.69	0.42
C	60	77.15	-17.15	294.12	3.81
D	59	64.03	-5.03	25.3	0.4
E	50	58.51	-8.51	72.42	1.24
F	75	61.46	13.51	183.33	2.98
G	18	17.4	0.6	0.36	0.02
H	20	15.9	4.1	16.81	1.06
I	12	16.7	-4.7	22.09	1.32
J	5	12.18	-7.18	51.55	4.23
K	10	11.13	-1.13	1.28	0.11
L	20	11.69	8.31	69.06	5.91
					$x^2 = 22.47$

Field Survey, (2019).

Chi square (x^2) calculated value = 22.47; Degree of free = D/f = (No. of rows – 1) (No. of columns – 1) (R-1) (C-1) = (3-1) (4-1) = 2 x 3 = 6. Obtaining the table value of 6 under 0.05 level of significant Chi-Square table value = 12.592.

Conclusion: The calculation above shows that computed x^2 value (22.47) is greater than the chi-square x^2 table value (12.592), we therefore accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1) and reject the null hypothesis (H_0) which states that cultural factors act as hindrance to Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion is based on the Girl Child Education and Socio-economic growth in Nigeria in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular. The analysis of the research question reveal that, there is a high level of gender disparity in education. This findings are in consonance with the view of (UNESCO, 2014). Gender disparity in education is compounded by additional deep-rooted forms of inequality, residence and disability. It also reveals, that the culture of the people, illiteracy and the rate of poverty impede the girl child education. This view supports the findings of Ocho, (2005), where it was stated that in most societies, the girl-child has lower status than the boy-child. The disadvantages of the girl-child begin at childhood from the cultural expectation of the sexes and the girl-child is faced with limited access to education. Again most people are poor and they spend the available resources on the male child thereby neglecting the girl-child education. Children from very poor households are much less likely to ever enroll in school. Living in a rural area where walking long distances to school is compounded by poverty and illiteracy together with traditional practices increases the risk of the girl-child education. UNESCO observes that in sub-Sahara Africa if recent trends continue, the richest boys will achieve universal primary completion in 2021, but the poorest girls will not catch-up until 2086; (UNESCO, 2014).

The result of the analysis above, shows that 300 respondents were not aware of any government policy concerning girl-child education while 200 respondents said yes they are aware of government policy. This result confirmed the fact that although the government of Akwa Ibom State has formulated the educational policy of free and compulsory education programme, the girl child has not received special attention.

Conclusion

Education remains an important tool in achieving national transformation. However, the quality and quantity of development in any nation will be improved through the collaborative effort of both males and females in the society. When the women in the society are deprived the opportunity of acquiring quality formal education, it will result in an immeasurable loss to the various sectors of the economy. Since the education of women has a comparative advantage to the advancement of the society, it is needful that all hands should be on deck to ensure that they are given quality education so as to enable them to contribute immensely to the development of the entire nation.

Recommendations

It is imperative that in order to improve the educational base of the typical Nigerian woman and by extension her socio-political and economic status, government, community leaders, parents, professional counsellors and other stakeholders should take cognizance of the following recommendations:

1. Government and other stakeholders in women affairs should strive to create conducive enabling socio-political and economic conditions which will discourage societal preference for male children and the traditional belief that the position of a woman is in the kitchen.
2. Government at all levels should make concerted effort to alleviate poverty at the grassroots, as this will undoubtedly help to overcome the challenge of parents not sending girls to school because of poverty.
3. The Federal, State and Local Government should provide free, compulsory primary and secondary education in all the 774 local Government Areas in Nigeria by building more standard schools, well-staffed and equipped to provide quality education so that the children can compete favourably with their counterparts from the country.
4. Parents should be enlightened to encourage the girl-child to acquire basic education, at least, that will make her self-reliant and enhance her ability to secure a better future for herself.
5. Federal/state/local government, NGOs, religious leaders and traditional councils should play a major role in leading these awareness and enlightenment campaigns on not only the importance of western education for the girl-child but also on the need to discard the various cultural and religious misconceptions that have militated against the girl-child education in Nigeria over the years.
6. Governments should also make a law that prohibits marriage for girls below the age of 20.
7. Various educational stakeholders should also be encouraged to contribute meaningfully to support the girl-child education in the country. The private sector, parents and school management should provide enabling environment for women to acquire quality education for sustainable development. This could be introduced as part of their corporate social responsibility to the society.
8. Appropriate human, financial and material resources should be provided to support female education in the country. These resources will help to provide a comfortable environment for every girl-child to study and contribute effectively to self and national development.

9. Proper laws and policies should be formulated by the government at various levels that will help defend the rights and privileges of female citizens to acquire formal education of their choice in the country.

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