

AN ANALYTICAL EVALUATION OF THE TREND OF PRIMARY SCHOOL
ENROLMENT IN EBONYI STATE:
THE CASE OF THE CHALLENGES FACING FEMALE CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Education of the girl-child has become a universal issue for African nations hence the need for striving to achieve a balance between the enrollment rates of their male counterparts. The goal of the paper was to analyse the challenges of the girl-child in Ebonyi State of Nigeria in terms of school enrolment. Descriptive survey involving secondary data was used for analysis covered the period 2001-2007. The study has discovered that the primary school enrolment rate of girls is still very low and still remains worrisome. This is further worsened by traditional system and belief pattern of gender disparity, and high incidence of early marriage of very young girls based on value system. Therefore, there is an immediate need for government attention in rural development, motivation of female interest in education, policy reform in content, and pedagogy with a singular target of making UNESCO Educational objectives achievable by 2015 in the State and Nigeria, as a whole.

Keywords: School Enrolment, Female Education, Ebonyi State

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of education remain enormous and unquantifiable. Education brings about sound knowledge, well- informed habits, sound ideas, skills and enhancement of positive attitudes. It is therefore essential, for it is still regarded as an important bridge of social, economic and political mobility (Amutabi and Oketch, 2003). Record has it that, one hundred and eighty-nine (189) countries so far have embraced the eight millennium development goals aimed at eradicating poverty and improving the welfare of their people by 2015. Another on the list is "Achieving Universal Primary Education by the year 2015, which implies that children all over the globe boys and girls alike would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (World Bank Review, 1995). Nigeria under the former regime of Olusegun Obasanjo initiated the Universal Primary Education in 2001 by launching the Universal Basic Education (UBE). It was backed legally by the UBE Act of 2004. This arrangement is aimed at providing basic education for 9 years. The first six years of Primary, and 3 years of Junior Secondary school which, should be free and compulsory.

This means that every child irrespective of gender in Nigeria is expected by this act to be enrolled in school particularly in Ebonyi State where the literacy rate of girls is very low. A

World Bank survey reports that with the emergent population explosion rate, that children between the age brackets of 6-11 years who are of primary school age that increased to 129 million in 1990, will increase to 162 million by the year 2015. Out of such number, how many will be girl-children, particularly from Ebonyi State? What likely steps should be taken to enable us meet national and world target towards the girl-child educational attainment and empowerment in Ebonyi State? How could girl-child enrollment rate be positively addressed in order to meet these targets? The survey revolves around these problems. In this paper, the issue of location or where the girl-child resides, either in the urban town, or rural villages was brought to the fore. Bearing in mind that; it plays vital roles in the enrollment of the young girls into the schools within Ebonyi local government headquarters. Ebonyi State is made up of 5 local government areas from Afipko and 8 local government areas from Abakiliki in addition to 64 newly created development centres in the state.

TRADITION, GENDER, AND CULTURE BARRIERS TO GIRL CHILD EDUCATION

Ebonyi State is culture enveloped and tradition friendly especially when it pertains to the female sex “women should be seen not heard” which gives them a perpetual position in the kitchen. The world belongs to the men folk. These are some of the humiliating traditional sayings directed to females. Right from the onset the traditional Ebonyi’s placed girls/females in a domestic servant status where they perform such duties such as farm works, fetch firewood, cook for the family and do petty trading to sustain their families and given out early in marriage, while the boy child goes to school. In agreement with the above observation, Sperling (2005:1) reported that rightly or wrongly impoverished parents often feel they need their girl-child” labour for additional income, just to help with the gruelling requirements of life,... Records have it that two thirds out of 13 million children around the globe poorest nations who don’t have access to school are girls (UNICEF, 2007). Sperling also went further that 60% of girls in an estimated population of 110 million children in the developing world, where Nigeria is one will not have the opportunity of entering school while the few girls enrolled will drop-out. This emerging scene is a thing of concern. This is not only in Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

A study in 1996 in Niger discovered that only 12% of girls in the rural areas were enrolled in primary school against 83% of girls’ enrolment in the urban city (Phi 2005). The current humiliating child-trafficking trend has a high percentage of primary school age girls. This unwelcome idea has kept many girls out of school, since their parents prefer to use them as a pledge for loan. On the other hand, once girls gain access to schools, however, they may experience both direct physical threats and more subtle assaults on their confidence, self esteem and identity (Pigozzi, 2002). The journey to school may be unsafe, since many girls experience harassment and physical attacks either on public transportation in urban areas or remote part in rural areas. In some cases extreme physical assault, including rape may be perpetuated against girls at school. The threats that come in the form of unequal treatment, harassment, bullying and undervaluing girls harm them in profound and long lasting ways in terms of school attendance. In some schools in Malawi, for example, male teachers sexually harass girls even with outside observers present (Miske, David, et al 1998).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In Nigeria, primary school education is universal and compulsory for every child of the school age 6-11 years old. And it is tuition free, “Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2005:15). The primary level being the foundation empowers the system or faults it for national development. It is very important therefore, to investigate the number of girl-child enrollment into primary schools as this could be necessary for achieving Universal Basic Education which is one of the targets of the Eight Millennium Development Goals, at the same time builds solid foundation for economic upliftment in Ebonyi State. The following research questions were used to achieve this purpose:

- What is the number of children that enrolled into primary schools in Ebonyi in the year (2001-2007)?
- What is the percentage of gender enrollment into primary schools in Ebonyi in the year (2001-2007)?
- What is the percentage of girls’ enrollment in urban and rural primary schools in Ebonyi State from the year (2001-2007)?

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This research is a descriptive survey and employed documentary statistics. The paper specifically studied government policies, and up-to-date available records to address the issue. Data used for the analysis were primary schools, teachers and primary school enrollment rate in Ebonyi State from 2001-2007.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1:

What is the number of school pupils enrollment into primary schools in Ebonyi State in the year (2001-2007)?

Table 1 above indicates that 679,160 pupils enrolled into 461 primary schools over a period of 7years in Ebonyi State. The distribution shows unsteady rise and decrease in enrollment in 2007 and almost a halt in 2004. In 2003, enrollment witnessed sharp increase to 115,981 in 2003 from 104,621 pupils in 2001, representing only a 4% change over the period. However, the change in enrollment reviews a form which is neither consistent nor predictable indicating a clear reflection of failure in educational planning policy and implementation.

Table 1: Children enrollment into Ebonyi State primary schools in the year 2001-2007

S/No	Year	No of Schools	Enrollment	Change in Enrollment	Remarks
1	2001	254	104,621	N.A	Sharp rise Dropped N.A Rise
2	2002	384	106,350	1,729	
3	2003	401	115,981	2,131	
4	2004	420	109,200	719	
5	2005	N.A	N.A	N.A	
6	2006	441	117,234		
7	2007	461	125,774	1,040	
Total		461	679,160		

Source: Extracts from primary school enrolment statistics, Ebonyi State, 2001-2007

Research Questions 2

What is the percentage of gender enrollment into primary schools in Ebonyi State in the year (2001-2007)?

Table 2: Percentage of enrollment into primary schools based on gender (2001-2007)

Years	Girls	%	Boys	%	%Diff	Total
2001	43,865	41%	63,632	59.10%	18.3	107,497
2002	48,188	42.80%	64,400	57.10%	14.30%	112,588
2003	51,976	44.50%	64,802	55.40%	10.90%	116,778
2004	52,171	43.70%	67,013	56.20%	12.50%	119,184
2005	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
2006	49,821	44.80%	61,224	55.10%	10.30%	111,045
2007	50,384	44.90%	61,684	55.00%	10.10%	112,068
	296,405		382,755			679,160

Table 2 indicates that the percentage of girls that were enrolled into primary schools in Ebonyi State over the period of (7) years was not at par with the boys. The table has shown high rate of increase on boys' enrollment rate over girls'. There was a drop in girl-child enrollment rate in 2004 in comparison to slight increase in 2003 even though not comparable to boys. Female enrollment rate in Ebonyi State has remained below 45% showing a proof of more boys in primary school than their female counterparts of primary school age.

Research Question 3:

What is the percentage of girl-child enrollment in urban and rural primary schools in Ebonyi State from the year 2001-2007?

Table 3: Percentage of girl-child enrollment in urban and rural schools from the year 2001-2007

S/No	Year	Urban town Enrollment of Girls	%	Rural Enrollment of Girls	%	Diff (U-R)	Total
1	2001	6,229	14.20%	37,636	85.80%	71.6	43,865
2	2002	6,746	14%	41,442	86.00%	72	48,188
3	2003	7,329	14.10%	44,647	85.90%	71.8	51,976
4	2004	7,460	14.20%	44,711	85.70%	71.4	52,171
5	2005	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
6	2006	3,139	6.30%	46,682	93.70%	87.4	49,821
7	2007	3,325	6.60%	47,059	93.40%	86.8	50,384
Total		34,228		262,177			296,405

Table 3 above reveals that out of the 296,405 girl-children that enrolled into primary schools over the period, 262,177 (about 88.5%) were in rural schools, while 34228 (or 11.5%) enrolled into urban primary schools in Ebonyi State capital, and five other local Government areas of Afikpo which are regarded as Urban areas of the state. The above distribution has shown a typical rural based children population in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. This shows instability inconsistency and in enrollment of the girl. The table above has illustrated clearly that out of 296,405 girl-children enrolled into primary schools, rural schools enrolled 37,636 (85.8%: in 2001, 4,1442 (86%) in 2002, 44,647 (85.9%) in 2003, 44,711 (85.7%) in 2004, 46,682 (93.7%) in 2006 and 47,059 (93.4%) in 2007.

The enrollment trend into Urban primary schools was as follows: 6,229 (14.2%) in 2001, 6,746 (14%) in 2002; 7,329 (14.1%) in 2003; 7,460 (14.3%) in 2003; 3,139 (6.3%) in 2006 with 3,325 (6.6%) in 2007, over 7years in Urban areas of Ebonyi State. There was a clear indication of disparity in the enrollment rate of the girl-child between urban and rural schools. This simply shows that enrolment trend of girl-child is rural-based.

DISCUSSION

The learner who is a customer in the educational industry primarily occupies a prominent place because the school exists mainly for his/her benefit (Igwe, 2002). As such the rate of girl-child enrollment becomes an issue of concern for national development and empowerment of every child. Statistics for this study indicates that 679,160 children were enrolled into primary schools in Ebonyi State over a period 7 years (2001-2007). A close look reveals that, change in the 6-11years girl-child enrollment into primary schools throughout the state was not only marginal but almost at the cross-roads over the period. Ebonyi State of Nigeria is a typical rural state with 80% of the population been peasant farmers who are yet to embrace modern birth control measures hence the rapid increase in population of children with majority not having access to basic primary education.

The findings agree with the World Bank Review Report (1995) which indicates that developing nations have the largest number of children who don't have access to primary education. This report reviews that 72 million out of the 113 million primary schools age

children are estimated to be out of school by 2015. In Ebonyi State, the finding of this study has revealed a very slow progress in girl-child participation over the years. The enrollment has been in favour of the boys, which is a clear expression of male dominance in academic activities and a rift in the gender issue. UNESCO study (1980) aligns with this study proving that 64% of women in Africa are illiterate and can neither read nor write. UNESCO also noted that in the mid 1980s, fewer than half of school-age girls were enrolled into primary schools. Ejembi (1994) also discovered that 77.8% of women in Africa got married before 15 years of age. This trend should be checked, particularly, in Ebonyi State of Nigeria in order not to keep reducing the productive base of the society at large and Ebonyi in particular.

The study has also proved that more children enroll in rural areas than the urban. As such government and stakeholders should concentrate more on education development of rural areas in order to benefit children of peasant farmers mostly found in rural areas. A boy-child has no better potential than the girl-child; as such female children should not be discriminated against or treated inferior to their male counterparts. Bridging gender gap would in no small measure increase national output. This is a major goal of (UNESCO's EDI, 2006) that many countries of the world are making commitment to ensure compliance. Following UNESCO Global Monitor (2006) which has reported that, 40% of Sub-Saharan African countries have Gross Intake Rates (GIRs) below 95%, which implies that ordinary access to primary education is still not-realistic, especially for the girl-child. Across sub-Saharan Africa, it is worthy to note that enrollment ratio of the girl child are rising progressively while gender gap is gradually closing up. Yet, countries like Nigeria and Ebonyi State in particular are still battling with low enrollment ratios and inability to accommodate all children of primary school age. However this calls for efforts to expand what is on ground and pave a way for quality.

UNESCO-Global Monitor (2006) has also indicated a likely increase of school-age children by 34million (32%) over the next decade and a significant percentage of the above figure is expected to emanate from Nigeria due to its population explosion in Africa. Ebonyi State is well known as a rural state of mostly peasant farmers where archaic customs and practices are still held in a very high esteem in a way that they dictate the trend of event, education is not left out. To buttress compulsory access to education of the girl-child, World Bank Review (2006) also reiterated that education at primary level is no longer considered a casual affair but rather a serious issue that emphasizes the right of every child in every country to be enrolled in primary school. With government solid support, this dream could become a reality.

CONCLUSION

This survey rightly concludes that enrolment of the girl-child to primary education in Ebonyi State is unimpressively low and calls for concern. A place where yearly primary school enrollment of girl-child increased only by a little above a thousand over a 7 years period shows a very slow increase rate indicating a crawling progress in educational sector. Also, a lower enrollment rate among rural children confirms the typical agrarian nature of Ebonyi State of Nigeria. This has also proved the rural economic nature, and culture of the people which lay more emphasis on girls been more useful in farms and kitchens and invariably financial assets in terms of early marriage rather than attend schools. With a population of 80% of rural parents; farming and early marriages are economically more viable than investing in girls-education whose returns, if at all, comes after 15 or more years. On this note, it is significant to bear in

mind that female rights and privileges are grossly trampled upon by tradition, religious norms and values, political and economic culture. Universal compulsory Primary education is crucial for national, economic and social advancement of the girl children in particular. This remains a goal for all developing countries to achieve by 2015, but one that will not be reached in Ebonyi State, without a significant acceleration of current progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper therefore recommends the following:

- Government should see the need for urgent provision of adequate and financial support as to ensure quality primary education improvement in rural areas, in particular.
- Female education should be encouraged to address gender disparity, special motivators such as scholarships, bursary allowances, free tuition up to higher institutions and automatic employment opportunities for girls who successfully complete their education should be in place.
- Government should pay more attention to infrastructural development as to enable school enroll more girls of school age in the state and provide facilities that are gender friendly.
- Adequate provision of facilities and socio-economic amenities in rural areas in order to encourage teaching and learning should not be compromised by government.
- As a predominantly rural state, Ebonyi State of Nigeria should be charged with educational reform programmes so as to bring about fast growth and development of the State.
- An institutional reform should be put in place by government that will bring more women into teaching and administrative positions. Also, a routine sensitization campaign to raise community awareness about the value of girl's education should be encouraged by government and school heads.
- Government should introduce civic/citizenship education in schools where the girl-child understands her right to education. Children's right to education recognizes children as persons and worthy citizens rather than as the property of their parents or as small and vulnerable "not yet's" (Verhellen, 1999). Not teaching children about their rights is a violation of rights in itself and a denial of their status as citizens.

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