

National Policy on Education and the Challenges of Girl-Child Education in Cross River State

Victoria Amiokama Eyong

Department of Political Science,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Corresponding author: amookama@gmail.com

Abstract

The importance of female education, especially in the developing countries, cannot be overemphasized. There is considerable evidence that the education of women has a direct impact on various aspects of the social, economic, and political well-being of a country. The study examined the National Policy on Education and the challenges of girl-child Education in Cross River State. *Mixed survey design was adopted for the study and a total sample of 295 respondents in Cross River State, Nigeria, participated in the study. The study was anchored on System Theory and findings showed that significant disparities in educational opportunities and the representation of girls in education. The consequences of limited educational opportunities for girls in Cross River State are far-reaching. The study recommends that Efforts should be made to improve access to quality education for girls. This includes the construction and renovation of school infrastructure, provision of safe transportation, and the implementation of policies that encourage and support girls' enrolment and retention in schools.*

Keywords: National, Policy, Girl, Child, Education.

Introduction

Globally, there is a growing recognition of the importance of education for the empowerment of girls. International organizations and agreements, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasize the need for inclusive and quality education for all, including girls (Okafor, 2023). Efforts are being made to address barriers to girls' education, such as gender-based discrimination and lack of access to schools. In many African countries, including Nigeria, there's a strong commitment to improving educational opportunities for girls. Challenges like socio-economic factors, cultural norms, and inadequate infrastructure are being addressed through policy initiatives. African nations are working towards gender equality in education, recognising the role of educated girls in community development and nation-building (Okafor, 2023).

Nigeria, Africa, and globally share a common belief that the development of a nation is closely tied to the quality of education provided by the government.

Education is seen as the key to addressing social, economic, and technological challenges. The Nigerian government, starting from the late 1950s, has made significant strides in education, establishing institutions like Yaba College of Technology, University College Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka, and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. Education plays a vital role in societal development, serving as the foundation for economic, political, and social progress (Bello & Tukur, 2021).

Recognizing its significance, UNESCO recommends that member nations allocate at least 26% of their budgets to the education sector. In Nigeria, various administrations have implemented educational programs to educate the entire citizenry. In 1955 and 1957, the Western and Eastern regions launched Universal Primary Education (UPE) schemes, though the Northern region did not adopt such a program. In 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo's Federal Military Government introduced the UPE program nationwide, but it faced challenges and was short-lived (Bello & Tukur, 2021). Despite this, in

1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's civilian regime initiated the Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBE), officially launched in 2001 (Idu, Bello & Alaji, 2022).

However, more than two decades later, the program has not fully implemented across all states due to various challenges. The UBE program, introduced in 1999, aims to provide compulsory education up to junior secondary school for Nigerian children, addressing gender disparities that disadvantage girls and women in the country's educational landscape. Despite these efforts, there's a notable failure in implementation due to insufficient government funding and monitoring, students' lack of interest, and a shortage of staff (Idu, Bello & Alaji, 2022).

Cultural beliefs also contribute, with some parents opposing education for female children, viewing it as a waste of time and resources. Recent times have seen cultural and social norms negatively impacting women's education, placing them at a disadvantage compared to men. Family type further influences female school dropouts, as the background of the school child significantly affects their ability to complete their education (Okafor, 2023).

Conceptual Review

Girl-Child

A girl-child is a young female child. The term refers to an individual whose gender identity is female, with the earliest recorded use dating back to around 1755 (Merriam-Webster, 2020). It also denotes an unmarried female Homo sapiens distinguished by anatomical and physiological characteristics. Undiyaundeye (2022) defines a girl-child as a female under 18 years old, encompassing infancy, toddlerhood, pre-school, school age, pre-puberty, and puberty stages. This developmental phase involves rapid physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and social growth, impacting future success or challenges. Knowledge acquired during this stage is considered permanent. UNICEF (2023) defines the girl-child as a female under 18, including non-school age

children, pre-primary, primary, secondary, and first-year female students in tertiary education. Osakinle and Akeredolu (2019) assert that in Africa and Nigeria, tradition and culture seal the destiny of girls and women, subjecting them to discrimination. Women are often labeled the weaker sex to justify societal oppression. The girl-child, confined by societal norms, becomes a commoditized property with limited rights. Girl-child education emerges as a potent tool for national growth, development.

Girl Child Education

Promoting education for girls involves enhancing the knowledge, attitude, and skills of females across various backgrounds, including schools, colleges, health education, and vocational training (Teachmint, 2020). Ensuring access to education is a fundamental human right irrespective of age, gender, religion, or nationality (School Software, 2021). According to Ugwu (2023), girl-child education is about making girls aware of their potential and training them in literacy and vocational skills for societal functionality. Empowering girls through education is crucial for national growth and development. In Nigeria, girl-child education contributes to reducing inequality by lifting individuals out of poverty, especially among ethnic minorities and rural families (Ebunife, 2022).

Empirical Review

Challenges Impeding Girl-Child Education within the framework of the National Policy on Education

Kasomo (2019) conducted a study to identify factors hindering girls' education in Lower Eastern Province, Kenya, using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Through simple random sampling, 260 girls and 305 boys were selected from specific schools, revealing that obstacles such as pregnancy, peer pressure, school fees, lack of parental guidance, drug addiction, and relationships were significant barriers to girls' educational progress. The research suggests a need for awareness campaigns to

emphasize education's importance, particularly for girls. Kasomo's findings contribute to understanding challenges in girl-child education, providing a basis for comparisons across Africa.

Effiong (2021) explored ways to enhance education standards for rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, employing simple random sampling to gather responses from 600 participants. The study uncovered that 60% of respondents attributed the reluctance to educate girls to perceived job scarcity, leading parents to steer their daughters toward trades and crafts. Emphasizing the importance of job opportunities, the research recommends governmental action rather than mere rhetoric in job creation. Effiong's study aligns with the present research, focusing on raising education standards in rural areas and empowering women through education.

Okafor (2023) investigated the socio-cultural impact of parents on girl-child education in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria, using a descriptive survey design with 240 parents. Employing multi-stage sampling, the study utilized a questionnaire named "SBPGEQ" and found that parental ignorance, the perception of girl-child education as a resource drain, and its perceived lack of profitability were influential factors. No significant differences were observed based on gender, religion, age, or educational qualification. Recommendations include tailored programs by government agencies and the involvement of counselors at all levels to counteract cultural biases against girl-child education. These three studies shed light on challenges related to girl-child education in different African regions. Kasomo's research highlights factors like pregnancy and lack of parental guidance, while Effiong emphasizes the role of perceived employment opportunities in influencing education decisions for girls in Akwa Ibom State. Okafor's study in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria, underscores the impact of socio-cultural beliefs, with recommendations for educational programs and counselor support. These findings collectively

contribute to understanding and addressing barriers to girl-child education across diverse contexts in Africa.

The Perceptions of Stakeholders Regarding the Implementation of the National Policy of Education in Relation to Girl-Child Education

Imam and Bichi (2020) explored inclusive education as a solution to challenges faced by girls in Nigeria. They addressed issues in girl child education, suggested eliminating gender disparities, and advocated collaboration for gender-sensitive curricula. Bello and Tukur (2021) studied community stakeholders' role in co-producing female child education in Zamfara State, addressing cultural barriers and poverty. They found community engagement improved enrolment and retention of girls in formal schools. Idu, Bello, and Alaji (2022) assessed the impact of project communication on girls' education programs in Bauchi State. They recommended using traditional and religious institutions for awareness. Kukwi (2023) investigated stakeholders' perceptions of Universal Basic Education implementation in North-central Nigeria, revealing dissatisfaction with implementation, inadequacy of resources, and identified challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate funding. The study recommended increased funding, teacher recruitment, infrastructure improvement, and regular program evaluation.

Theoretical Framework (System Theory)

David Easton pioneered the application of system theory to political science in 1953 with his renowned work, "Political System." Easton aimed to transform politics into a scientific discipline by employing abstract models to depict patterns and processes in political life (Easton, 1953). System theory, as part of the expanding behavioral literature, sought to enhance the scientific nature of description and utilize it for inductive purposes in theory building. Easton advocated for viewing politics holistically, treating it as an integrated entity

rather than a collection of isolated problems (Varma, 1975). His primary model, rooted in an organic perspective on politics, portrayed it as a dynamic, living entity, rejecting the notion of "equilibrium" prevalent in other political theories. Easton dismissed the idea that politics could be analysed at different levels and asserted that his abstractions could encompass any group or demand at any given time. Essentially, his theory elucidates what enables political systems to adapt and endure, presenting a constant flux in politics and challenging traditional ideas found in theories like institutionalism. Additionally, Easton integrated interest group theory and elite theory into his political system analysis (Easton, 1953).

Critics argue that system theory tends to prioritise structural aspects, sometimes at the expense of dynamic processes. This focus on the arrangement of components may not capture the evolving nature of systems. It's important to note that while these criticisms exist, system theory also has its strengths and has proven valuable in various fields. The criticisms often prompt researchers to refine and adapt the theory rather than discard it entirely. In the light of the above, the System Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the intricate relationships and interdependencies within complex systems. When applied to the study of the National Policy of Education and the challenges of girl-child education in Cross River State, System Theory provides a broader perspective on how various components interact to shape educational outcomes. In this context, the National Policy of Education can be viewed as a subsystem within the larger educational system. The policy, with its formal rules and guidelines, serves as a set of instructions directing the functions and behaviours of educational institutions, stakeholders, and participants.

System Theory emphasises the interconnectedness of these elements, highlighting that changes or challenges in one part of the system can have ripple effects throughout. The challenges faced in

girl-child education in Cross River State, such as gender-based stereotypes, socio-economic disparities, and cultural norms, can be considered as dynamic variables within the broader educational system. System Theory posits that these challenges are not isolated incidents but are interconnected with other components of the system, including the formal policy framework, educational institutions, and the larger societal context. Moreover, System Theory accentuates the role of feedback loops and adaptation within systems. As policies are implemented, feedback mechanisms come into play, influencing how the policy is received, interpreted, and enacted by various stakeholders.

The theory suggests that for effective policy implementation, there must be an ongoing process of feedback and adjustment to address emerging challenges and ensure alignment with the evolving needs of the educational system. Stakeholders, including government bodies, educators, parents, and communities, are integral components of the educational system. System Theory underscores their roles as active participants in the system, impacting and being impacted by policy decisions.

Their interactions, influenced by both formal policy structures and informal societal norms, contribute to the overall functioning of the educational system. In essence, System Theory provides a holistic lens to examine the National Policy of Education and girl-child education challenges in Cross River State. It encourages researchers and policymakers to consider the interrelated elements, feedback mechanisms, and dynamic adaptations within the educational system to develop more nuanced and effective strategies for addressing the complexities associated with girl-child education in the region.

Research Methodology

Research Design

To achieve the study's objective, a mixed

survey research design was employed, chosen because the researchers gathered and analyzed data from a limited number of subjects deemed representative of the entire population.

Population of the Study

The study encompasses all primary and secondary schools in Northern Cross River State. The target groups include 1,217 primary six female pupils from ten primary schools, 1,800 female students from four secondary schools, 45 secondary school teachers from four secondary schools, 30 staff of Cross River State Universal Basic Education within the state, and 12,781 parents from selected local government areas (Biase, Obankilu, Obudu, Ogoja, and Yala). The total population according to Cross River State Bureau of Statistics (2023) is 14,073.

Sample Size

Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample table of specification, the sample size for the study is 302.

Sampling Technique

Proportionate random sampling was employed to select respondents from different secondary schools, ensuring

representation across the population.

Method of Data Collection

A questionnaire served as the data collection instrument, face-validated by two political science experts from Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Respondents rated each item on a four-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Additionally, key informant interviews were conducted with 5 teachers, 3 parents, and 2 staff from Cross River State Universal Basic Education Board.

Method of Data Analysis

Tools used for analyzing collected data included mean scores, frequency tables, and simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the results of data obtained on the respondents in frequency counts and percentages. A total of three hundred and two (302) questionnaires were administered during data collection of this study. However, only 295 (97.7%) were duly responded and return, while the remaining seven (2.3%) were either damaged or more than one option was indicated by the respondents.

Table 1 Sex Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	%age
Male	140	47.5
Females	155	52.5
Total	295	100

Source: Field Surve, May, 2023

Table 1 depicts the analysis of data collected with respect to gender of the respondent. It shows that 155 representing 52.5 % of the respondents are females and 140

representing 47.5% of the respondents are males. This translates to mean that majority of the respondents are female.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age (years)	Frequency	%age
12-20	41	13.9
21-30	141	47.8
30-49	59	20
50- years and above	54	18.3
Total	295	100

Source: Field Surve, May, 2023.

The result presented in Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents' age. The table reveals that 41 (13.9%) of the respondents were below 30 years; 141 (47.8%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21-30 years; while 59 (20%) of the respondents

were between the ages of 30-49 years of age and 54 (18%) of the respondents were from 50 years and above. This also indicates that respondents, who were between 21-30 years, participated more in the study.

Table 3 Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	%age
Single	107	36.3
Married	181	61.4
Divorced/Separated	6	2.0
Widowed/Widower	1	0.3
Total	295	100

Source: Field Surve, May, 2023.

The result presented in Table 3 shows the analysis of data collected with respect to marital status of the respondents. It depicts that 107 (36.3%) % of the respondents were single, 181(61.4%) of the respondents were married, 6% of the respondents were

divorced and separated and 1.0% of the respondents were widowed/ widower. Judging from the frequency distribution table above, the highest frequency is 181 with 61.4%, this translates to mean that majority of the respondents were married

Table 4: Educational Attainment of Respondents

Education	Frequency	%age
No formal education	12	4.0
Primary education	31	10.5
Secondary education	86	29.2
Tertiary education	166	56.3
Total	295	100

Source: Field Surve, May, 2023.

Table 4 shows the analysis of data collected with respect to educational qualification of the respondent. It depicts those 12 respondents representing 4.0 % of the respondents not having formal education, 31 respondents representing 10.5% have primary school certificate, 86 respondents representing 29.2% have secondary school certificate; while only 166 respondents

representing 56.3% have tertiary educational qualification amongst the respondents. Judging from the frequency distribution table 4, the highest frequency is 166 with 56.3%. This translates to mean that majority of the respondents are literates. The level of an individual's education is believed to influence the education of their children.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents based on Religion

Religion	Frequency	%age
Christianity	241	81.7
Islam	16	5.4
Others	38	12.9
Total	295	100

Source: Field Survey, May, 2023.

The result presented in Table 5 shows that 241 (81.7%) of the respondents were Christians; 16 (5.4%) of the respondents were Muslims; while 38 (12.9%) of the

respondents were practicing other religion. This indicates that respondents practicing Christianity participated more in the study.

Table 6: Challenges Impeding Girl-Child Education in Cross River State within the Framework of the National Policy of Education

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})
Inadequate educational infrastructure, such as a lack of well-equipped schools and proper facilities, poses a significant challenge for girl child education in Cross River State	187(748) (63.4%)	104(312) (35.3%)	3(6) (1.0%%)	1(2) (0.3%)	3.6
Persistent gender disparities in societal attitudes and cultural norms discouraged families from prioritizing girls' education.	174(696) (47.0%)	64(192) (37.6%)	30(60) (8.1%)	27(27) (7.3%)	3.3

Poor access to healthcare services can impacts on girls' education as health issues, particularly those related to reproductive health, may lead to absenteeism and dropout rates.	158(632) (53.6%)	126(378) (42.7%)	9(18) (3.1%)	2(2) (0.6%)	3.6
Poverty-related issues, such as the cost of uniforms, textbooks, and transportation, may disproportionately affect girls' enrollment and retention in schools	181(724) (61.4%)	100(300) (33.9%)	9(18) (3.1%)	5(5) (1.6%)	3.6
Despite national policies promoting gender equality in education, the effective implementation of these policies at the state level in Cross River may is lacking.	195(780) (66.1%)	90(270) (30.5%)	6(12) (2.0%)	4(4) (1.4%)	3.6
Average Overall Mean					3.6

Source: Field Survey, May, 2023.

Table 6 shows that the challenges of girl-child education in Cross River State. The sectional mean of 3.6 shows that the respondents agreed that there are various factors impeding girl-child education in Cross River state, Nigeria

There are numerous socio-cultural issues which hinder women/girls from attending higher education barriers to qualitative women enrolment in higher education in Cross River State. However, these barriers differ from one socio-economic environment to the other. This is a result of indoctrination and misinterpretation of cultural beliefs. A farmer, Ibanga Okoi, interviewed in one of the study villages narrated his ordeal thus:

Why should I send my daughter to university, what will be my response to my ancestors? I prepared to

mound culture over the human-made system of education which brings nothing but immoral behaviour resulting in serious abnormalities in the society (KII, May, 2023)

The above is a direct quote from one of the respondents who have been indoctrinated into the wrong notion and interpretation of the scripture. On the other hand, a traditional title holder, Obol James Arikpo, who is educated at the University level, when asked how he handled the above situation lamented thus:

As a leader of the community, I have been making frantic efforts to ensure that people send their girl children to higher education. I also

invited preachers to appeal to the community with the use of scripture to change their attitude but to no avail. As it is now, I have three female children who are in SS3 and registered JAMB. The moment t they score the required points I will send them to university to serve as a good example to this community, I think this is the only option for now (KII, May, 2023)

- There is a cultural belief that in some communities the worth of a woman is equal to her capacity to farm. This implies that the more capacity she has in farming the higher her worth and the more bride to ask for her marriage. Men usually devise means and strategies to marry such women at all costs. In a situation where she attends higher education, she is considered lazy and unworthy of marriage. These societies place a caveat on women not to marry outside their clan, tribe or lineage because it is considered taboo or deviant and attracts severe spiritual sanction. Most women have been mentally brainwashed acculturated and assimilated into the archaic and barbaric culture for fear of consequences of exceeding boundaries. In an interview with Adie Ugbong a 78-year-old man in Obudu, he narrated thus:

Which school are you talking about apart from the tradition left to us by our forefathers? And that the best school here is farming, women are the natural energy propelling the system. Who marries school girls who are so lazy and indoctrinated into Western culture? It is a waste of resources, time and relegation of the society to a borrowed culture which has no place in our history (KII, May, 2023)

However, some of the young girl contacted during the interview has shown an element of intelligence, skills, eloquence and

determination to attend higher education. One of them, Mary Ukpiliya lamented thus:

I finished my secondary year in 2020. I had sat for both WAEC and NECO with seven (7) credits in both examinations. However, my parents have the economic capacity to pay for my higher education expenses but for obedience to culture refused to do so. My maternal uncle had pledged to take the responsibility but my father declined. I insisted, and he commented that if I go never return to the village as his biological daughter. As it is now, I am confused as to what next action to take (KII, May, 2023).

Several interviewees emphasized the lack of educational facilities and resources in rural areas, making it difficult for girls to continue their education beyond secondary school and limited access or absence of nearby tertiary institutions hinder the educational advancement of girls. This lack of opportunities contributes to the perpetuation of traditional gender roles, restricting girls from assuming leadership positions. There are indications were positive parental and community support emerged as a critical factor in encouraging girls to pursue education beyond secondary school. Interviews highlighted cases where supportive parents defied societal norms and encouraged their daughters to continue their education. In such cases, girls expressed a desire to assume leadership positions and contribute to their communities. There is also a poverty of ideas and mental health issues that require psychological intervention.

The school fees are increasing while the means to pay for them remain static and scarce. The purchasing power of parents with limited financial resources is declining, making it difficult for them to send their children to school. Many Nigerians now live below the poverty line

and cannot afford the cost of education for their children. In situations where an opportunity arises, preference is often given to male children, even if they are less academically inclined. Many parents, especially single parents, have no choice but to allow their children, especially girls, to engage in unimaginable occupations such as prostitution (Akomolafe, 2005). When asked about is the solution to this problem, a respondent, responded as follows:

There is nothing comparable to education on earth. Everything you see, observe, and enjoy are product of education. This is the age of practical education. All those who have acquired leadership

positions have done so on the foundation of education. Without addressing the socio-cultural barriers surrounding girl-child education, the chances of girls assuming leadership positions in Cross River State will remain limited. Empowering girls through education and challenging traditional gender roles are crucial steps toward creating a more inclusive society that values female leadership. Efforts should focus on community engagement, parental education, mentorship programs, and policy reforms to provide equal opportunities for girls to excel academically and assume leadership positions (KII, May, 2023).

Table 7: Perceptions of Stakeholders Regarding the Implementation of the National Policy of Education in Relation to Girl-Child Education in Cross River State

	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	Mean (\bar{x})
The implementation of the national policy of education is a positive force for empowering girls in Cross River State.	208(832) (70.5%)	63(189) (21.4%)	18(36) (6.1%)	6(6) (2.0%)	3.6
Deeply rooted cultural norms and traditions present challenges to the successful implementation of policies aimed at promoting equal educational opportunities for girls	204(816) (69.2%)	77(231) (26.1%)	10(20) (3.4%)	4(4) (1.3%)	3.6
The National Policy on education has improved quality and access of the girl child to formal education in Cross River State	171(684) (58%)	107(321) (36.3%)	10(20) (3.4%)	7(7) (2.3%)	3.5
Inadequate resources, poor monitoring mechanisms, or inconsistent enforcement of policy are hindrances to the implementation of National Policy of Education in Cross River State	191(764) (64.8%)	87(261) (29.5%)	13(26) (4.4%)	4(4) (1.3%)	3.6

Sustained efforts and collaboration will eventually lead to positive outcomes, such as increased literacy rates and improved socio-economic conditions for girl child in Cross River State	203(812) (68.8%)	61(183) (20.7%)	29(58) (9.8%)	2(2) (0.7%)	3.6
Average Overall Mean					3.6

Source: Field Surve, April, 2023.

Table 7 indicates the perception of stakeholders regarding the implementation of National Policy of Education on the girl-child education in Cross River State. The sectional mean of 3.6 shows that the respondents agreed with the items above. To buttress this claim, it is observed that in some parts of Nigeria, the common

practices of forced and early marriage constitute the most significant constraints to women's education, while in the Southern parts of Nigeria, socio-economic status and obnoxious cultural practices constitute major obstacles to the girl-child education. As depicted in the table below:

Table1.3: Enrolment Distribution of Girls and Boys in Higher Education in Cross River State

Year	Total number of Enrolments	Male	Female	% of Female Enrolment	Ratio of Female Enrolment
2015	15834	11876	3958	24.99%	1:3
2016	16234	13987	2247	13.84%	1:6
2017	14567	10912	3655	25.09	1:3
2018	13456	11114	2242	16.66	1:5
2019	15890	12671	3219	20.25	1:4
2020	--	-	-	-	-
2021	15678	12123	3555	22.67	1:3
2022	19892	13567	6325	31.79	1:4

Source: Cross River State Ministry of Education

In 2015, the total number of enrolments was 15,834. Out of these, 11,876 were male and 3,958 were female. This translates to approximately 24.99% of female enrolment. The ratio of female to male enrolment was 1:3. In 2016, the total number of enrolments increased to 16,234. The male enrolment was 13,987, while the female enrolment was 2,247. The percentage of female enrolment decreased to 13.84%. The ratio of female to male enrolment was 1:6. In 2017, the total number of enrolments decreased to 14,567. The male enrolment was 10,912, and the female enrolment was 3,655. The percentage of female enrolment increased to 25.09%. The ratio of female to male

enrolment remained the same at 1:3.

In 2018, the total number of enrolments further decreased to 13,456. The male enrolment was 11,114, and the female enrolment was 2,242. The percentage of female enrolment was 16.66%. The ratio of female to male enrolment changed to 1:5. And in 2019, the total number of enrolments increased again to 15,890. The male enrolment was 12,671, and the female enrolment was 3,219. The percentage of female enrolment rose to 20.25%. The ratio of female to male enrolment changed to 1:4.

In 2021, the total number of enrolments was 15,678. The male enrolment was 12,123, and the female enrolment was 3,555. The percentage of female enrolment

increased to 22.67%. The ratio of female to male enrolment remained at 1:3. While in 2022, the total number of enrolments significantly increased to 19,892. The male enrolment was 13,567, and the female enrolment was 6,325. The percentage of female enrolment further increased to 31.79%. The ratio of female to male enrolment changed to 1:4. Based on the provided data, it can be observed that the enrolment of girls in higher education in Cross River State has shown some fluctuations over the years. The percentage of female enrolment has varied between 13.84% and 31.79%, with the highest percentage occurring in 2022.

The ratio of female to male enrolment has ranged from 1:3 to 1:6, indicating a higher proportion of male students throughout the years, although the ratio improved in some years. It is important to note that the data for 2020 is missing, so the enrolment distribution for that year is not available. The above table implies that there has been a consistent gender imbalance in higher education enrolment in Cross River State over the years. In each year, the number of male students enrolled is significantly higher than the number of female students. This disparity suggests potential barriers or challenges that hinder female participation in higher education.

However, despite the gender imbalance, there is a gradual increase in the percentage of female enrolment from 2015 to 2022. The percentage of female enrolment ranges from 13.84% in 2016 to 31.79% in 2022. This upward trend indicates efforts to improve access and opportunities for female students, although further progress is still needed. The ratio of female enrolment compared to male enrolment provides a clearer picture of the gender disparity. Throughout the years, the ratio remains relatively consistent, with around 1 female student for every 3 to 6 male students. This indicates a consistent underrepresentation of females in higher education at Cross River State

Looking at the trend, if the pattern continues, there is a likelihood of an increasing number of female enrolments in

the coming years. However, it is crucial to address the underlying factors causing the gender imbalance to ensure equal access and opportunities for both male and female students. Overall, the table revealed the gender disparity in higher education enrolment in Cross River State, with fewer females compared to males.

Discussion of Findings

- i. The study found that there are various challenges affecting the girl-child education in Cross River State. These challenges include but not limited to cultural, social, economic and political factors. Kasomo (2019) found that obstacles such as pregnancy, peer pressure, school fees, lack of parental guidance, drug addiction, and relationships were significant barriers to girls' educational progress. Okafor (2023) found that parental ignorance, the perception of girl-child education as a resource drain, and its perceived lack of profitability were influential factors. Similarly, Effiong (2021) uncovered that 60% of respondents attributed the reluctance to educate girls to perceived job scarcity, leading parents to steer their daughters toward trades and crafts.
- ii. The study also found that deeply rooted cultural norms and traditions present challenges to the successful implementation of policies aimed at promoting equal educational opportunities for girls. This is in agreement with an earlier study by Kukwi (2023) that found revealing dissatisfaction with implementation, inadequacy of resources, and identified challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate funding. Bello and Tukur (2021) They found community engagement improved enrolment and retention of girls in formal schools. Similarly, Imam and Bichi (2020) found that inclusive education is a solution to challenges faced by girls in Nigeria.

Conclusion This study on the National Policy of Education and Girl-Child Education in Cross River State has examined the challenges faced by girls in rural areas in Cross River State, Nigeria, regarding their access to education beyond the secondary level and the socio-cultural factors influencing their ability to assume leadership positions. The findings revealed significant disparities in educational opportunities and the representation of girls in education. The consequences of limited educational opportunities for girls in Cross River State are far-reaching. It hampers their ability to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to pursue leadership positions. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles perpetuates gender inequalities and deprives communities of diverse perspectives and experiences in decision-making processes.

Recommendations:

To address these challenges and promote women's education for leadership positions, the following recommendations are put forth:

- i. Efforts should be made to improve access to quality education for girls. This includes the construction and renovation of school infrastructure, provision of safe transportation, and the implementation of policies that encourage and support girls' enrolment and retention in schools.
- ii. Raise awareness and engage communities to challenge socio-cultural norms and biases that hinder girls' education and leadership development. Promote dialogue, advocacy, and community engagement to foster stakeholders' positive attitudes towards girls' education and their potential to assume leadership roles.

References

Ajao, A. (2001). School factors as predictors of junior secondary school students' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement in social

studies. *Unpublished M.Ed. Dissertation*. Ago Iwoye: Institute of Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University.

Akinbi, J.O. & Y.A. Akinbi. (2015). Gender disparity in enrolment into Basic Formal Education in Nigeria: Implications for National Development. *AFRREV (African Research Review): An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 9(3), 11-23.

Bello, M. & Tukur, B. (2021). Contributions of community stakeholders in the co-production of female child education in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 11(2), 258-275

Bichi, B & Imam, A (2020). **Inclusive education as a panacea to the challenges of girl child education in Nigeria**. *Kano Journal of Educational Psychology*, 2(2), 205-212

Garba, M.D. (2014). Negative cultural trends towards the Girl-Child. *Unpublished Paper* presented at a One-Day Sensitization Meeting with Community/Traditional and Religious Leaders in Gombe State.

Gorard, S., See, H., & Davies, P. (2012). The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation. Available online at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-youngpeople-parents-full.pdf> [accessed August, 5, 2023]

Idu, O., Bello, F., & Alaji, G. (2022). Beneficiaries' knowledge and perception of girls' education Programme Strategies in Bauchi State, Nigeria. *Journal of Administrative Science* 19(1), 247-269

Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30, 607-610

Kukwi, J. (2023). An Assessment of stakeholders' perception of the implementation of Universal Basic

- Education in North-Central Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 4(7), 33-49
- Muraina, M & Monsuru B. (2014). Impact of note taking and study habit on academic performance among Selected Secondary School Students in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria” in *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2 (6) 437-448.
- Okafor, P. (2020). Affirmative strategies to reduce male child disparities in basic school in Imo State, Nigeria. In *SOSIOHUMANIKA: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan*, 13(1), 45-54.
- Okafor, P. (2023). Influence of socio-cultural background of parents on girl-child education in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria. *International Journal for Education Studies*, 15(1), 42-59
- Okoli, E. (2007). Gender Disparity in Nigerian Education: Women's Experience of Barriers to Equal Educational Opportunity” in *Dissertations*, No.902. Available online also at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/902>
- Onoyase, A. (2018). Attitude of parents toward female-child Secondary Education in Sokoto State, Nigeria: Implications for counselling. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 8, (2) 21-27
- Ugwu, N.U. & B. de Kok. (2015). Socio-Cultural Factors, Gender Roles, and Religious Ideologies Contributing to Caesarian-Section Refusal in Nigeria. *Reproductive Health*, 12 (70), 14-29
- UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund]. (2023). *The State of the World's Children 2023: A Fair Chance for Every Child*. New York: Division of Communication, UNICEF. Available online also at: https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_SOWC_2023.pdf