

## **Socio-Cultural Determinant of Girl Child Education in Cross River State**

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### **Abstract**

**W**orldwide attention is focused on actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Beyond policies and laws establishing universal basic education, the implementation of UBE's laudable objectives and overcoming the various challenges facing it within the school system are the dominant factors for the attainment of sustainable development goals, most especially SDG 4 and SDG 5. But the worrisome nature of the problem of gender disparity internationally has to be dealt with, so as not to derail that dream. It has been noted that one of the challenges in basic education in Africa remains the disproportionate balance in gender representation in school enrollment. In Nigeria, since the advent of UBE, there has been a noticeable increase in school enrolment, the first step in access to education. Education, a fundamental right of every child and crucial for societal transformation, has seen a rise in female enrollment. Yet, existing studies lack clarity on the cultural factors driving this change. This research aims to explore how parents' cultural and religious beliefs influence girl-child education in Cross River State, involving 7,500 respondents with a sample size of 347, determined using Krejcie and Morgan. Data collection utilized a self-structured questionnaire, and analysis employed descriptive statistics like frequency count and mean. The findings suggest that parents' religious convictions impact the girl child's education, and cultural ideas also play a role.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Social, Girl, Child, Education.

### **Introduction**

Globally, there is an increasing acknowledgment of the significance of education in empowering girls. Entities like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals stress the necessity for inclusive and quality education for all, including girls (Okafor, 2023). Initiatives are underway to tackle obstacles hindering girls' education, such as gender-based discrimination and limited school access. Many African nations, including Nigeria, are strongly committed to enhancing educational opportunities for girls, addressing challenges like socio-economic factors and cultural norms through policy measures. African countries strive for gender equality in education, recognizing the role of educated girls in community development and nation-building (Okafor, 2023)

In Nigeria, education gained popularity, especially among rural residents, following economic declines in the early 1980s,

leading to a significant rise in children's enrollment in educational institutions nationwide. The Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at the pre-primary level increased from 10.9% in 2003/2004 to 18.1% in 2009/2010, with nearly equal male and female enrollment. Primary school enrollments for both sexes reached 19,151,438; 25,773,044; 19,992,309; and 20,663,805 in 2000, 2003, 2008, and 2010, respectively. Secondary school enrollments also progressed from 2,277,291 in 2000 to 3,624,163; 2,934,972; 3,476,063; and 5,010,227 in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2010 (National Population Commission [NPC] (Nigeria) and RTI International, 2016). Increased access to formal education for children stems from the realization that education is a vital tool for social and economic empowerment, particularly benefiting women and girls. Educated women and girls experience lower mortality during childbirth, reduced vulnerability to diseases like HIV/AIDS, and are better

equipped to defend themselves against violence. Education also contributes to literate, healthy, and manageable family sizes (Bello & Tukur, 2021).

Barriers faced by female children in obtaining quality education include financial constraints, ineffective teaching methods, child labor and trafficking, diseases, poor educational infrastructure, and gender discrimination (Idu, Bello & Alaji, 2022). Efforts to overcome these challenges often encounter resistance due to practices such as inadequate prioritization of girls' education, perceptions conflicting with traditional norms, and the prevalence of early or child marriages (Idu, Bello & Alaji, 2022). In Cross River State, the education of girls has been a hot-button subject for many years. It is still a concern in some areas. Women have had educational disadvantages in Cross River State when compared to men. The issues with girls' education in Cross River State, in particular, include poverty, tradition, and culture, in which women are typically viewed as low in status and have limited expectations of opportunities to secure a good education, decently paid jobs, or hold a leadership position (Ekeng & Jacks, 2020). Equally, Ayara, Essia, and Udah (2023) stipulated that the incorrect attitude toward female education has led to the prostitution of many young girls, and some have been forced into family situations they were not prepared for.

Against this backdrop, this study interrogates socio-economic and sociocultural determinants of girl child education in Cross River State.

### **Theoretical Framework (Classical Modernisation Theory)**

The study adopted modernisation theory, originating from Weber and Parsons, and popularised by Walter Rostow in the 1960s (Goorha, 2017). The theory posits that societies must embrace sophisticated values to progress into modernity, replacing

traditional norms and behaviors. Modern societies, deemed more complex and productive, are considered developed, while Third World societies are viewed as undeveloped. The study suggests a shift towards Western values, with unbiased education for all children gaining prominence in developing societies, replacing traditional practices detrimental to the growth of women.

In the context of Cross River state, examining how economic growth influences cultural perceptions of education for girls provided an insight into the challenges and opportunities for enhancing girl child education. Factors such as traditional gender roles, societal norms, and access to resources plays crucial roles in shaping the educational landscape for girls in the region. Analysing these aspects within the framework of modernization theory offered a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Survey research design was employed. This was chosen because the researcher gathered and analyzed data from a limited number of subjects deemed representative of the entire population.

#### **Population of the Study**

The targeted population of the study include students from SS1 to SS3 in Army Day Secondary School, Eburutu Barracks, Estate Secondary School, Calabar Municipal, Government Secondary School, Ikot Effanga Mkpa and Government Girls Secondary School, Big Qualified Town, Big Qua Town, as well as their fathers and mothers. The targeted population also consist of fathers, mothers, as well as guardians. This is presented in Table 3.1 as follows:

**Table 1. Population of the Study**

Name of Organisation	Target Population
Army Day Secondary School	480
Eburutu Barracks	350
Estate Secondary School	270
Calabar Municipal, GSS	332
Ikot Effang Mkpa	450
GGSS, Big Qualified Town,	304
Teachers	135
Parents of Students	5,179
Total	4,376

Source: Compiled from the Administration departments of the various organisations by the researcher (June, 2023)

**Sample Size**

The study's sample size comprises 364 respondents from government-owned secondary schools in Calabar Municipality, including Army Day Secondary School, Eburutu Barracks, Estate Secondary School, Calabar Municipal, Government Secondary School, Ikot Effanga Mkpa and Government Girls Secondary School, Big Qualified Town, Big Qua Town. The researcher determined the sample size based on a table indicating that for a population of 7,500, the appropriate sample size is 364. This aligns with Krejcie and Morgan's recommendation, as cited by Kenpro (2012).

**Sampling Technique**

Random sampling techniques were utilized

to select the sample from the overall study population. The researcher visited the selected secondary schools, randomly selecting 364 respondents, ensuring an unbiased process by counting numbers with one person per interval in the senior secondary section. For non-probability sampling, purposive sampling technique is adopted in selecting one head and his or her assistant from each of the targeted organisations that form our population of the study on the basis of their presumed depth of knowledge and experience on issues regarding girl child education in Cross River State, Nigeria. Therefore, 15 respondents are selected for interview on the basis of their experience and depth of knowledge on the issues under study as presented in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Targeted Population for In-depth Interview**

Name of Organisation	Target Population
Army Day Secondary School (Principal and Vice)	2
Eburutu Barracks (Principal and Vice)	2
Estate Secondary School (Principal and Vice)	2
Calabar Municipal, GSS (Principal and Vice)	2
Ikot Effang Mkpa (Principal and Vice)	2
GGSS, Big Qualified Town, (Principal and Vice)	2
Teachers	2
Ministry of Education Cross River State (Desk Officer)	1
Total	15

Source: Compiled from the Administration departments of the various Organisations by the Researcher (June, 2023)

It is expected that before 15 respondents would have been interviewed, the researcher would have reached a saturation point, and discontinue with the interview. If the saturation point was not reached, the interview section would be continued until saturation point is achieved in line with saturation theory. However, the saturation point was attained after the interview of 7 respondents, and the researcher discontinued with the interview.

#### Method of Data Collection

The research instrument utilised was a questionnaire designed to collect data and responses from both students and parents in selected secondary schools in Cross River State, 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).

#### Method of Data Analysis

Tools used for analysing 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 sixty-four (364) copies of questionnaire were administered during data collection of this study. However, only 347 (95.3%) were duly responded and returned, while the remaining seventeen (4.7%) were either damaged or more than one option was indicated by the respondents.

**Table 1.1 Sex Distribution of Respondents**

Gender	Frequency	%age
Male	167	48.1
Females	180	51.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Surve, July, 2023.**

Table 1.1 depicts the analysis of data collected with respect to gender of the respondent. It shows that 167 representing 48.1 % of the respondents are males and 180

representing 51.9% of the respondents are females. This translates to mean that majority of the respondents are females.

**Table 1.2. Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age (years)	Frequency	%age
12-20	93	26.8
21-30	141	40.6
30-49	59	17.0
50- years and above	54	15.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Surve, July, 2023.**

The result presented in Table 1. 2 shows the distribution of respondents' age. The table reveals that 93 (26.8%) of the respondents were below 30 years; 141 (40.6%) of the respondents were between the ages of 21-30 years; while 59 (17%) of the respondents

were between the ages of 30-49 years of age and 54 (15.6%) 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 1.3 Marital Status of Respondents**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%age</b>
Single	157	45.2
Married	181	52.2
Divorced/Separated	7	2.0
Widowed/Widower	2	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Surve, July, 2023.**

The result presented in Table 1.3 shows the analysis of data collected with respect to marital status of the respondents. It depicts that 157 (45.2%) % of the respondents were single, 181(52.2%) of the respondents were married, 2.0% of the respondents were

divorced and separated and 0.6% of the respondents were widowed/ widower. Judging from the frequency distribution table above, the highest frequency is 181 with 52.2%, this translates to mean that majority of the respondents were married.

**Table 1. 4: Educational Attainment of Respondents**

<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%age</b>
No formal education	12	3.5
Primary education	31	8.9
Secondary education	138	39.8
Tertiary education	166	47.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Surve, July, 2023.**

Table 1.4 shows the analysis of data collected with respect to educational qualification of the respondent. It depicts those 12 respondents representing 3.5 % of the respondents not having formal education, 31 respondents representing 8.9% have primary school certificate, 138 respondents representing 39.8% have secondary school certificate; while only 166

respondents representing 47.8% have tertiary educational qualification amongst the respondents. Judging from the frequency distribution table 4, the highest frequency is 166 with 47.8%. 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 1.5: Distribution of Respondents based on Religion**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%age</b>
Christianity	241	69.5
Islam	68	19.6
Others	38	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, July, 2023.**

The result presented in Table 1. 5 shows that 241 (69.5%) of the respondents were Christians; 68 (19.6%) of the respondents were Muslims; while 38 (10.9%) of the respondents were practicing other religion. This indicates that respondents practicing Christianity participated more in the study.

**Table 1. 6: Socio-Cultural Factors that Impact the Level of Girl-Child Education in Cross River State, Nigeria.**

	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b> ( $\bar{x}$ )
	<b>Freq.</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq.</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq.</b> <b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq.</b> <b>(%)</b>	
Religious beliefs of parents affect girl - child education	239(956) (68.9%)	104(312) (29.9%)	3(6) (0.9%%)	1(2) (0.3%)	<b>3.7</b>
Girls need to get marriage to curb sexual immorality influence girl -child education	226(904) (65.1%)	64(192) (18.5%)	30(60) (8.6%)	27(27) (7.8%)	<b>3.4</b>
Western education is not essential in religious holy books influence girl -child education.	210(840) (60.5%)	126(378) (36.3%)	9(18) (2.6%)	2(2) (0.6%)	<b>3.6</b>
Women should not speak in religious settings influence girlchild education	233(932) (67.2%)	100(300) (28.8%)	9(18) (2.6%)	5(5) (1.4%)	<b>3.6</b>
Religious propaganda in past decades influenced parents' belief in girl-child education.	246(984) (70.9%)	90(270) (25.9%)	6(12) (1.7%)	5(5) (1.5%)	<b>3.7</b>
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>					<b>3.6</b>

**Source: Field Survey, July, 2023.**

Table 1. 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. At this juncture, the researcher posed questions to respondents tagged In-depth Interview Participants 1 to 9 from 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> of July to identify the nexus between socio-cultural factors and girl-child education in Cross River State, Nigeria. The responses are as



follows: The Desk Officer of Cross River State Ministry of Education, Sunday Bassey stated that:

In our community, socio-cultural factors like early marriage and traditional gender roles play a significant role in limiting girls' access to education. Additionally, certain cultural practices prioritize boys' education over girls', further perpetuating the gender gap in education (Field Survey, 2023).

The principal of GSS Calabar Municipality, Mr. Friday Effiong asserts that:

In rural areas, girls often face challenges like long distances to schools, lack of transportation, and inadequate facilities. Addressing these challenges requires investment in infrastructure, such as building more schools and providing transportation subsidies for girls (Field Survey, 2023).

**Table 1. 7: Cultural and Societal Dynamics Influencing the Importance Assigned to Girl-Child Education in Cross River State, Nigeria.**

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
The beliefs of parents on human sexuality negatively affects the education of the girl-child	260(1,040) (74.9%)	63(189) (18.2%)	18(36) (5.2%)	6(6) (1.7%)	<b>3.6</b>
Cultural beliefs of some parents of the preference of a male child over female children affect girl child education	256(1,024) (73.8%)	77(231) (22.2%)	7(20) (2.0%)	7(7) (2.0%)	<b>3.6</b>
Attitude of parents that domestic responsibilities are best for females affect girl -child education.	223(892) (64.3%)	107(321) (30.8%)	10(20) (2.9%)	7(7) (2.0%)	<b>3.6</b>
The attitude of parents that educating females will make them rebellious and not submissive to their husbands discourages girl child education	243(972) (70.0%)	87(261) (25.1%)	13(26) (3.7%)	4(4) (1.2%)	<b>3.6</b>
The attitude of parents excluding women from decision-participation and control over their own lives affect girl child education	255(1,020) (73.5%)	61(183) (17.6%)	29(58) (8.4%)	2(2) (0.5%)	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Average Overall Mean</b>					<b>3.6</b>

Source: Field Surve, July, 2023.

Table 1. 7 indicates the cultural and societal dynamics influencing the importance assigned to girl-child education in Cross River State, Nigeria. 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. To buttress the findings, the researcher posed questions to respondents from 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, to determine their views about cultural and societal dynamics influencing the importance to girl-child education in Cross River State, Nigeria. Responses from the findings showed that:

In Cross River State, like in many parts of Nigeria, there exists a strong patriarchal culture where the emphasis is often placed on boys' education over girls. Traditional beliefs sometimes dictate that girls' primary role is within the household, which can hinder their access to education. Additionally, socioeconomic factors play a significant role, as families facing financial constraints may prioritise educating boys due to perceived future economic benefits (Field Survey, 2023).

A resident of Calabar Municipality, Mrs. Grace Akpan, buttressing the above, posit that:

Over the years, various initiatives have been implemented to address these challenges. Community-based programmes that engage with local leaders and parents to challenge traditional gender norms have shown promise. Additionally,

providing incentives such as scholarships, school feeding programs, and safe transportation for girls have helped increase enrollment rates. Moreover, awareness campaigns emphasising the importance of girls' education in empowering communities and breaking the cycle of poverty have been effective in garnering support for girls' education initiatives (Field Survey, 2023).

### Discussion of Findings

- i. Study findings for research question one revealed that majority of the respondents are of the opinion that there is a level of influence of religious beliefs of parents on girl-child education. This is due to the high cluster mean score of 3.6 to the 5 items in table 6. In line with this finding, Finlay and Finlay (2016) as well as Yaacob (2020) studies have shown that parental religion plays a crucial influence in affecting the effectiveness of their girl child education.
- ii. Results obtained from the present study as regards research question two revealed that there is influence of parents' cultural beliefs towards girl child education. In line with this study, Okobia and Ekejiuba (2018) study revealed that the patriarchal cultural beliefs that persisted in indigenous African culture are to blame for Africa's poor education of the girl child. Similarly, Onyeansi (2019) found those significant influences from early marriage, gender preferences, socio-cultural factors, parents' socio-economic status, and political factors. Recommendations stressed avoiding early marriages and encouraging girls about education before marriage.

### Conclusion

Education is the inherent right of every girl



worldwide, as it serves as the catalyst for transforming her life and the circumstances in her local community. Without access to education, girl child are deprived of the invaluable opportunity to reach their full potential and play a meaningful and equitable role in their families, societies, nations, and the world. Unfortunately, schools in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas, are often subpar, leading to even the fortunate girls receiving a low-quality education of short duration.

Many schools in Nigeria are in dire condition, conducting classes in overcrowded, poorly constructed buildings with limited access to basic materials like paper, pencils, textbooks, and computers. Significant efforts are still required to enhance the quality and accessibility of education for girls in Nigeria. Overcoming the prevailing social stigma against girls' education is a formidable challenge that must be addressed. Proactive measures, such as enacting laws in African countries to prohibit early marriage practices hindering girls' schooling, are crucial. Furthermore, Nigerian governments need to legislate mandatory primary education for girls and rigorously enforce these laws in rural areas.

#### Recommendations:

To address these challenges and promote girl child education for leadership positions, the following recommendations are put forth:

- i. To mitigate the influence of parental religious beliefs on girls' education, the government should collaborate with community and religious leaders. Regular programs should be organized to enlighten parents about the importance of encouraging female education. These initiatives can raise awareness about the positive impact of educating girls on families and communities, challenging the perception that investing in female education is a financial burden.
- ii. Policies promoting gender-balanced education and curriculum should consider the influence of parental culture on girls' educational interests.

This approach aims to motivate girls to learn, while also addressing the well-being of teachers. Additionally, a review of the school curriculum is necessary to ensure cultural and gender sensitivity.

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