

Challenges and Opportunities for Girl Child Education Under the National Policy of Education in Cross River State

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Abstract

The issue of girl child education in Nigeria has been a persistent challenge, despite efforts to address it through various national policies. The National Policy on Education, introduced to promote equal educational opportunities for all children in Nigeria, has not been uniformly successful in ensuring access to quality education for girls. Research indicates that socio-cultural, economic, and political factors continue to undermine the implementation of policies aimed at enhancing girl child education in many parts of Nigeria, including rural areas where traditional norms still play a dominant role. Yet, existing studies lack clarity on the cultural factors driving this change. This paper examined challenges and opportunities for girl child education under the national policy of education in Cross River State. The paper used 7,500 respondents with a sample size of 347, determined using Krejcie and Morgan. Data collection utilised 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 education, and cultural ideas also play a role. Strategies to enhance cultural and religious beliefs on girl-child education include mandating education, increasing female representation in chosen roles, and promoting awareness programme. The study recommends encouraging girls to attain basic education for independence and a brighter future.

Keywords: Challenges, Opportunity, 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 enrolment 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 enrolment. Primary school enrolments 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 enrolments 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 labour 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 good education, decently paid jobs, or hold leadership position (Ekeng & Jacks, 2020). Equally, Ayara, Essia and Udah (2023) stipulated that the incorrect attitude toward female education has led to 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 socio-cultural determinant of girl child education in Cross River State

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Several studies have delved into the socio-cultural factors impacting girl-child education in various regions of Nigeria, shedding light on critical issues hindering girls' access to education. Shuaibu (2022) bemoaned the fact that some people are forced into prostitution and compelled to work as housemaids or babysitters while they should be in school. Their labour is exploited without allowing them to take part in economic control, and they are stricken to better the family's financial status. They are now emotional wrecks as a result of violence, divorce, and beatings on their wives. However, the study primarily focuses on the consequences of denying education to girls rather than exploring the root causes of this phenomenon. Investigating the underlying factors driving families to prioritize economic gain over girls' education, despite its detrimental effects, would provide valuable insights for designing interventions aimed at breaking the cycle of exploitation and promoting girls' access to education.

Omorogiuwa and Igun (2023) examined the influence of parents cultural and religious beliefs on Girl-Child Beliefs on Girl-Child Education in Government Secondary School in Egor Local Government, Edo State, Nigeria. The population of the study is 7, 500 respondents, while the sample size was 500. The Krejcie and Morgan sample table was used to determine the sample size of the study. The research instrument used for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as frequency count, mean and standard deviation. Based on analysis of the data, the study found that parents'

religious convictions have some degree of effect on how well the girl child is educated. The study recommended that girls should be encouraged to get at least basic education by their parents so that they can become independent and have a better future. However, while the research highlights the impact of these beliefs, it lacks a nuanced exploration of the specific cultural and religious norms shaping parental attitudes towards girls' education. A deeper understanding of the underlying cultural and religious frameworks could elucidate the reasons behind parents' decisions regarding their daughters' education and inform targeted interventions to address barriers.

Adanna and Patrick (2023) focused on the interpretative paradigm to understand socio-cultural factors affecting the enrolment and retention of female pupils in primary schools in rural communities of Ebonyi state, Nigeria. Culture-related issues, such as farming lifestyles, early marriages, and gender biases, were identified. Recommendations emphasized government and NGO-led advocacy programmes to raise awareness for girl child education in Ebonyi State. However, the study primarily adopts an interpretative paradigm without delving into the specific mechanisms through which these socio-cultural factors impact girls' education. Exploring the interplay between cultural norms, economic factors, and educational policies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by girls in rural communities.

Alhassan (2023) analysed factors hindering girls' education in the Gushegu-Karaga District. The study identified poverty, low parental income, low parental education, early marriage, boy child preference, religious practices, household chores, child betrothal, child fosterage, and polygyny as impediments. Recommendations include educational campaigns, sex education, vocational training, bye laws, affirmative action policies, and school management committees to overcome socio-economic and cultural barriers and promote girls' progress. Yet, the study's focus on identifying barriers may overshadow the exploration of potential solutions. While recommendations such as educational campaigns and affirmative action policies are proposed, further elaboration on the feasibility and implementation strategies of these interventions within the specific context of Gushegu-Karaga District would enhance the study's practical implications.

Okafor (2023) investigated the socio-cultural impact of parents on girl-child education in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria, using 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 programmes by government agencies and the involvement of counselors at all levels to counteract cultural biases against girl-child education. However, the study's reliance on a descriptive survey design and questionnaire limits the depth of insights obtained, particularly regarding the nuances of parental attitudes and beliefs. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide richer insights into the underlying cultural dynamics shaping parental decisions regarding girls' education. Furthermore, while tailored programs and counselor support are recommended, the study could benefit from detailed strategies for their implementation and evaluation within the local context.

Okobia and Ekejiuba (2020) investigated parental attitudes and girlchild education in Nigeria's Edo State. 450 people from Benin's capital city were selected at random to participate in the survey. The tool that was used to collect the data was called Parental Attribute towards Girl-Child Education. The data were statistically analysed using t-test and an analysis of variance. An importance limit of 0.05 was utilized to test theories. The findings demonstrated that parents were supportive of girls' education. Parents from southern Nigeria who lived in the Benin metropolis were more likely than parents from northern Nigeria to support their daughters' education. Additionally, the findings demonstrated that, in comparison to Muslim parents, Christian parents are more supportive of their daughters' education. However, while the research provides valuable comparisons, it predominantly relies on quantitative methods such as t-tests and analysis of variance, limiting the depth of insights obtained. Qualitative research methods could complement these findings by exploring the underlying reasons for regional and religious differences in parental attitudes towards girls' education, including cultural norms, religious beliefs, and socio-economic factors.

Theoretical Framework

Public Policy Implementation Theory

The theory's development was driven by real-world policy failures in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, where many well-formulated policies failed to deliver on their promises due to shortcomings in their implementation. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) conducted an in-depth case study on an economic development program in Oakland, California, which revealed that despite the program being well-planned; it failed due to a lack of coordination between different agencies and levels of government. This study shifted the focus of policy studies from design and formulation to the intricacies of implementation. As the theory evolved, scholars began to differentiate between top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementation. Top-down approaches, as exemplified in the work of Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980), focus on the role of policymakers at the highest levels and assume that if policies are clear and resources are provided, implementation will be effective. On the other hand, bottom-up approaches, such as those proposed by Lipsky (1980), highlight the role of frontline workers and local actors, arguing that they have significant discretion in how policies are executed on the ground. Over time, hybrid models emerged that integrated both perspectives, acknowledging that successful implementation often requires collaboration between various levels of government and stakeholders.

Several key assumptions underpin Public Policy Implementation Theory. First, it assumes that implementation is a complex, multi-actor process. Policies, once formulated, must be enacted by multiple layers of government, and success depends on the coordination and cooperation of various stakeholders. This includes not only governmental agencies but also non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community leaders, and sometimes private sector actors (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). In the context of girl child education under the National Policy of Education in Cross River State, this means that the effectiveness of the policy depends on the coordinated efforts of educational authorities, local schools, NGOs promoting education, and the community at large.

Secondly, the theory assumes that implementation is highly dependent on resources. Even well-designed policies will fail if there are insufficient financial, human, or technical resources to support them (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). For example, if the National Policy of Education allocates funds for girl child education but those funds are not effectively distributed or managed, the policy's goals will not be met. This is particularly relevant in regions such as Cross River State, where limited resources may exacerbate existing challenges in education. Another important assumption is that clear communication and understanding of policy goals are essential for successful implementation. If the actors responsible for enacting a policy do not fully understand its objectives or if there are ambiguities in the policy itself, it will be difficult to achieve the desired outcomes. This is particularly important for policies like the National Policy of Education, which involve multiple stakeholders, each with their own priorities and interpretations of the policy's goals.

Despite its contributions, Public Policy Implementation Theory has been critiqued for several reasons. One major critique is that it often assumes a top-down approach, focusing on the role of policymakers and high-level officials in determining the success of a policy. This perspective can overlook the role of local actors and the discretion they have in interpreting and implementing policies. Lipsky's (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy" highlights how frontline workers, such as teachers and local administrators, play a critical role in policy implementation by making decisions that affect how policies are enacted on the ground. In the context of girl child education, for example, local teachers may interpret the policy differently from state or federal education authorities, leading to variations in how the policy is implemented in different areas.

Public Policy Implementation Theory has been applied across a variety of policy areas, including education, healthcare, environmental management, and social welfare. In the context of girl child education under the National Policy of Education in Cross River State, the theory can be used to assess the effectiveness of the policy's implementation and identify the barriers and opportunities present in the process. By applying the theory, this paper investigate how local educational authorities, community leaders, and governmental agencies interact to implement the policy, focusing on the challenges they face, such as resource limitations, socio-cultural attitudes, and administrative inefficiencies.

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
Total	347	100

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

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
Total	347	100

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

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

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

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

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

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

Source: Field Surve, July, 2024.

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

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

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

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: challenges affecting the implementation of girl child education under the National Policy of Education in Cross River State

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{x})
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
The availability of adequate funding significantly affects the implementation of girl child education in Cross River State.	239(956) (68.9%)	104(312) (29.9%)	3(6) (0.9%)	1(2) (0.3%)	3.7
Cultural beliefs and practices hinder the effective implementation of girl child education under the National Policy of Education.	226(904) (65.1%)	64(192) (18.5%)	30(60) (8.6%)	27(27) (7.8%)	3.4
Government commitment to enforcing policies for girl child education is a major challenge in Cross River State.	210(840) (60.5%)	126(378) (36.3%)	9(18) (2.6%)	2(2) (0.6%)	3.6
Lack of infrastructure and learning materials impacts the success of girl child education in the state.	233(932) (67.2%)	100(300) (28.8%)	9(18) (2.6%)	5(5) (1.4%)	3.6
Community support for girl child education is crucial for its successful implementation under the National Policy of Education.	246(984) (70.9%)	90(270) (25.9%)	6(12) (1.7%)	5(5) (1.5%)	3.7
Average Overall Mean					3.6

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

Table 1. 6 reveal significant challenges in implementing girl child education in Cross River State. A lack of adequate funding, with a high mean of 3.7, greatly affects progress, as most respondents (68.9%) agree. Cultural beliefs also impede implementation, as shown by a mean of 3.4. Government commitment remains a challenge, with a mean of 3.6, while inadequate infrastructure, rated at 3.6, further hampers success. Community support, seen as vital, scores the highest mean of 3.7, reflecting strong agreement on its importance. Overall, the findings suggest that these combined factors significantly impact the effective implementation of girl child education. At this juncture, the researcher posed questions to respondents tagged In-depth Interview Participants 1 to 9 from 15th to 20th 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: opportunities within the National Policy of Education that can enhance the educational attainment of the girl child in Cross River State

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (\bar{x})
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	
The National Policy of Education provides opportunities for equal access to education for the girl child in Cross River State.	260(1,040) (74.9%)	63(189) (18.2%)	18(36) (5.2%)	6(6) (1.7%)	3.6
Government scholarships under the National Policy of Education can enhance the educational attainment of the girl	256(1,024) (73.8%)	77(231) (22.2%)	7(20) (2.0%)	7(7) (2.0%)	3.6

child.

The inclusion of gender-sensitive programmes in the policy creates opportunities to improve girl child education.	223(892) (64.3%)	107(321) (30.8%)	10(20) (2.9%)	7(7) (2.0%)	3.6
The National Policy of Education encourages community involvement, which can support the educational attainment of the girl child.	243(972) (70.0%)	87(261) (25.1%)	13(26) (3.7%)	4(4) (1.2%)	3.6
Training and capacity building for teachers under the policy can enhance the quality of education for the girl child in Cross River State.	255(1,020) (73.5%)	61(183) (17.6%)	29(58) (8.4%)	2(2) (0.5%)	3.6
Average Overall Mean					3.6

Source: Field Survey, July, 2024.

Table 1. 7 highlight the positive impact of the National Policy of Education on girl child education in Cross River State. Equal access to education is supported, as indicated by a high mean of 3.6, with 74.9% of respondents agreeing. Government scholarships and gender-sensitive programmes, both rated at 3.6, are seen as effective in improving educational outcomes. Community involvement and teacher training, each with a mean of 3.6, are also viewed as crucial. Overall, the results suggest that the policy has contributed significantly to enhancing the educational attainment and quality for girls in the state.

Discussion of Findings

The present study's findings on the challenges affecting girl child education under the National Policy of Education in Cross River State align with several previous studies. For instance, Akpede, Asogun, Momodu, and Igbenu (2018) found that parental behaviour significantly influenced girls' education, with 54.8% of respondents citing it as a major factor. Similarly, the present study identified cultural beliefs and practices as a significant barrier, with 65.1% of participants acknowledging that these factors hinder effective implementation of girl child education. Both studies highlight how societal attitudes and behaviours continue to pose obstacles to female education.

Despite these challenges, the National Policy of Education presents various opportunities to enhance the educational attainment of the girl child in Cross River State. A key opportunity lies in the policy's provision for equal access to education, with 74.9% of respondents acknowledging its potential in ensuring that girls have the same educational opportunities as boys. Additionally, the introduction of government scholarships under the policy, which was supported by 73.8% of participants, provides a financial pathway for girls to pursue their education. Gender-sensitive programmes, which create targeted initiatives to promote girl child education, were highlighted by 64.3% of respondents as another valuable aspect of the policy. Moreover, the involvement of communities, as encouraged by the policy, was supported by 70% of participants as a means of fostering a conducive environment for girls to succeed in education. Therefore, if these opportunities are fully leveraged, the National Policy of Education could significantly improve the educational attainment of the girl child in Cross River State.

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 address the challenges identified, such as cultural resistance and limited resources, the government should implement community-driven awareness programmes. These programmes should involve local leaders, parents, and educators to promote the importance of girl child education. Culturally sensitive campaigns that highlight the long-term economic and social benefits of educating girls could reduce cultural barriers and encourage greater community participation.
- ii. The government and stakeholders should take advantage of the available opportunities by forging partnerships with international organisations and NGOs that focus on education. These partnerships can provide additional funding, resources, and expertise to bolster girl child education programmes, ensuring that policies are better implemented and more accessible to disadvantaged regions, particularly in rural areas of Cross River State.

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