

# **GENDER DISPARITY IN SCHOOL ENROLMENT: COUNSELLING INTERVENTION FOR THE GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION**

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## **Abstract**

*Gender disparity in school enrolment and inequality access to quality and adequate education has generated tremendous interest in educational research and human capital development literature in recent times. This descriptive survey provides empirical evidence on the attitudes of parents in Gwagwalada township, FCT towards the girl-child education. A simple random sample size of 122 resident parents consisting of 70 males and 52 females was drawn for the study. The research instrument, a close-ended questionnaire called parental attitudes towards the girl-child education (PATGE) generated data for the study. The study used mean scores, standard deviation, t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to analyse the data generated. Results revealed that the attitudes of parents and guardians to the girl-child education were seemingly impressive although with significant deviations from the norm. The two variables gender and educational background had no significant bearing on parents' attitudes, implying that there was no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female parents on one hand and educational background on the other hand towards the girl-child education. However, a significant difference in parental attitudes over the girl-child education was found with respect to religious orientation. The authors recommended that counseling intervention should sensitize the general public for change of attitude towards the education of the girl-child.*

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## Introduction

Women in Nigeria have had various challenges in order to obtain equal education in comparison with their male counterparts. Education is a basic human right and has been recognized as such since the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. A positive correlation exists between the enrolment of girls in primary school and the gross national product (GNP) and the increase of life expectancy (World Bank, 2010). Because of this correlation, enrolment in school represents the largest component of investment in human capital in any society (Schultz, 2002).

According to Nussbaum (2003), rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the caliber of women and their education in that country. Aliu (2001) observed that education bestows on women a disposition for a long acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills. The combined gross enrolment for primary, secondary and tertiary schools for females in Nigeria was 57% compared with 71% for males in 2002 (UNESCO, 2014). This translates into fewer women in certain economic fields as well. The percentages of female workers in some selected professions were as follows: architects: 2.4%, quantity surveyors: 3.5%, pediatricians: 33.3%, lawyers/jurists: 25.4%, lecturers: 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists: 8.4%, media practitioners: 18.3% (UNESCO, 2014). Issues of gender equality in education have been the subject of much debate during the past decades and have continued to become a prominent topic of debate in all countries. In Nigeria, there are large disparities between the education that boys and girls receive. Many girls do not have access to adequate education after a certain age. Obasi (1997) observed that currently, the female adult literacy rate (ages 15 and above) for the country was 59.5% in comparison to the male adult literacy. According to Central Bank of Nigeria (Aromolaran, 2004), the gender gap in literacy rate at the rural level between boys and girls was 18.3% in favour of the boys overall. However, in the age groups of 6-9 years (primary school ages) it was only 3.9% in favour of the boys. This indicates that there is a gender dimension to educational attainments and development in Nigeria. According to the Examination Council of Nigeria (1994) there are still other problems such as high drop-out rates of female students, poor performance, reluctance on the part of female students to enroll in science courses or poor classroom participation (Ogunyigbe, Ojofetimi & Akinlo, 2006).

Across various geo-political delineations in Nigeria, a greater percentage of school-age girls are needlessly out of school compared with the rate applicable to boys of the same age group (Ojo, 2002). There are various cultural and socio-economic issues that prevent women from having adequate access to education. According to a study carried out by Denga (1993), one prominent view is that it is better for the woman to stay at home and learn to attend to the family instead of attending school. To explain the fact that more boys than girls participated in education, Nigeria researcher, Obasi (1997) identified a host of other constraints with Nigerian tradition being named as top of the list. The Nigerian tradition was explained as a tradition that attaches higher value to a man than a woman whose place is believed to be in the kitchen. A study by the University of Ibadan linked the imbalance in boys to girls' participation in schooling to the long held belief in male superiority and female subordination (Uwakwe, Ajibola, Emmunemu & Omobola, 2008).

Offering girls basic education is one sure way of giving them much greater power of enabling them to make genuine choices over the kind of lives they wish to lead. This is not a luxury. The convention on the rights of the child and the convention on the

elimination of all forms of discrimination against women established it as a basic human right. The women might have the chance of a healthier and happier life should be enough reason for promoting girls' education. There are also important benefits for society as a whole. An educated woman has skills, information and self confidence that she needs to be a better mother, wife, worker or citizen. An educated woman is for example, likely to marry at a later age and have fewer children. Cross country studies shows that an extra year of schooling for girls reduces fertility rate by 5 to 10% and the children of an educated mother are more likely to survive. In India for example, the infant mortality rates for babies whose mothers have received primary education is half that of children whose mothers are illiterates. An educated woman will be more productive at work and better paid. Indeed, the dividends for educational investment are often higher for women than men. Studies from a number of countries suggest that an extra year of schooling will increase a woman's future earnings by about 15% compared with 11% for a man. Other benefits are future educational generations, decrease in maternal and infant mortality, decrease in child marriage, decrease in population explosion, increase involvement in the political process, decrease in domestic and sexual violence, decreased support for militancy, improved socio-economic growth among several others. These and more are some of the valuables reasons why we should all support education for girls. For every boy that is educated, every girl should be educated too.

**Table 1: Gender Disparity in Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education in Nigeria**

Indicator	1990	2000	2001	2004	2006	2008
Ratio of girls to boys in primary education (girls per 100 boys)	76	78	79	81	83	85.4
Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (girls per 100 boys)	75	81	80	74	79.4	79.9
Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education (girls per 100 boys)	46	66	87	75.5	69	66.8
Proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament (%)	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	75

**Source: FGN (2014)**

### Statement of the Problem

Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for women as both the Cairo and Beijing Conferences affirmed. It is also an area that offers some of the most conspicuous incidences of discrimination women suffers. Among children not attending school, there are twice as many girls as boys and among illiterate adults, there are twice as many women as men. Education is very important for every child, whether boy or girl. Unfortunately, many countries still discriminate against the education of the girl-child. According to why we should support Girls' Education (2011), about 57 million children around the world are not going to school. The report, children still battering to go to school finds that 95% of the 28.5 million children not getting primary school education live in low or lower middle income countries, 44% in sub-Saharan Africa, 19% in South and West Asia and 14% in the Arab states. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) said girls make up 58% of the total number of casualties, often victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence that accompany armed conflicts. The completion of the second Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target,

that is education for all by 2015 is already a mirage having missed the initial deadline of 2005. In Nigeria, educational facilities are generally inadequate and access is limited for many especially girls and women (Uku, 1992). According to United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR, 2005), Nigeria was classified as low development country in respect to equality in educational accessibility. Counseling intervention has not fared well in effecting attitudinal change in favour of the girl-child and her legitimate right to education. This study is a renewal of the clarion call to support the girl-child education and to bridge the unacceptable gender disparity in access to adequate and quality education. The setting for the study is Gwagwalada Township in the Federal Capital Territory.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to determine parents' attitude towards the girl-child education on the basis of gender, religious orientation and educational background.

### **Research Question**

The following question shall guide the conduct of this study:

1. What are the general attitudes of parents towards the girl-child education?

### **Research Hypotheses**

This study hinges on the following null hypotheses to be tested at 0.05% level of significance:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female parents towards the girl-child education.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the attitudes towards the girl-child education due to the religious orientation of parents.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the attitudes towards the girl-child education due to the educational background of parents.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Reflections on the prevailing state of the girl-child education in Nigeria shall provide an insight into the plight of the girl-child and the predisposing factors responsible for this anomaly. This will equip counselors with requisite knowledge to devise workable strategies to arrest this gender imbalance and role stereotype among the general public. Counseling intervention shall aim at disabusing the minds of parents and prospective parents to give equal educational opportunities to children of both gender. Thus counseling as a science of behaviour modification shall go a long way to redress this longstanding gender divide in educational accessibility. The girl-child too can be sensitized to justify her parents investment in her education and thus vindicate herself from longstanding misconceptions.

### **Methodology**

The research design for this study is descriptive survey. The population consists of parents resident Gwagwalada township. A sample size of 122 residents was selected through simple random sampling procedure comprising 70 male and 52 females. Data for the study was generated through a 15-item instrument called Parental Attitude Towards Girl-Child Education (PATGE). The questionnaire consist of two parts: Part A sought information on demographic characteristics of respondents on such variables as gender, educational background and religious faith. Part B solicited parents' feelings and attitudes on sundry issues regarding the girl-child education. The close-ended instrument

required respondents to tick from the 4-point type scale of Agree (A), Strong Agree (SA), Disagree (D) and Strong Disagree (SD). The data generated was analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, t-test analysis of variance (ANOVA).

## Results

The findings of the study are presented as follows:

### Analysis of research question:

What are the general attitudes of parents towards the girl-child education?

**Table 2: Attitude towards the girl-child education**

S/N	Item	means	Std Deviation	Decision
1	A boy-child is better than a girl-child.	2.041	1.071	Rejected
2	Having only girl children in a family is rather unfortunate.	1.860	.990	Rejected
3	A girl-child is more of a liability than an asset.	1.901	.974	Rejected
4	A boy-child deserves better education than a girl-child.	1.967	1.019	Rejected
5	A girl-child is not as intelligent as a boy-child	1.737	.925	Rejected
6	Our cultural setting places a higher value on the education of a boy-child than the girl-child.	2.983	.871	Accepted
7	An educated girl just like any other girl will end up in another family entirely.	2.827	.933	Accepted
8	A girl-child should be given minimal education just to fulfil her gender role in child bearing and home keeping.	1.967	.986	Rejected
9	An educated woman is hardly submissive to her husband.	2.196	.950	Rejected
10	Education has the tendency to corrupt the girl-child because of exposure to the opposite sex.	2.106	1.050	Rejected
11	A girl-child does not do well in school.	1.541	.772	Rejected
12	Limited resources in the family cannot adequately cater for all children hence preference to the boy-child.	2.295	1.088	Rejected

A graphic look at the findings in the table above reveals that majority of parents and guardians are favourably disposed to the education of the girl-child. However, they acknowledged that their cultural setting places a higher premium on the education of the boy-child than the girl-child. Similarly, they agreed that an educated girl may end up in another family who will reap the benefits of her education. This is reflected in the mean scores of 2.983 and 2.827 respectively with standard deviation from the norm below 1. It is also worthy of note that items 1, 4, 10 and 12 recorded significant deviations from the norm. This indicated that a reasonable proportion of respondents agreed with the issues in contention, even though a moderate majority indicated otherwise in favour of girl-child education. On the whole, the attitudes of parents towards the girl-child education appeared impressive at least from the results in principle.

**Testing Hypotheses**

H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female parents towards the girl-child education. The findings are tabulated below:

**Table 2: t-Test Result on Difference between Male and Female Parents' Attitudes to the Girl-Child Education**

Attitude	Number	Mean	S.D	t-value	df	Sig	Decision
Male	70	2.332	.654	2.672	120		Accepted
Female	52	1.832	.556			.105	

The table above shows that the t-value of 2.672 is not significant at .105 degree of significance (P>0.05). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted to the effect that there is no significant difference between male and female parents in their attitudes towards the girl-child education.

H0<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in attitudes towards the girl-child education due to the religious orientation of parents.

**Table 3: Parental Attitude to the Girl-Child Education on the Basic of Religious Orientation (ANOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Decision
Between groups	11.621	3	3.874	11.087	.000	Rejected
Within Groups	41.228	118	.349			
Total	52.849	121				

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) presented in the table above tested significant difference in the attitude of parents towards the girl-child education with regard to religious faith. With F=11.087, F is therefore significant at .000 (P < 0.05). The null hypothesis is hereby rejected on the ground that there is significant difference between the two variables.

H0<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference in attitude towards the girl-child education due to the educational background of parents

**Table 4: Parental Attitude to the Girl-Child Education on the Basic of Educational Background (ANOVA)**

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Decision
Between groups	.920	1	.920	2.126	.147	Accepted
Within Groups	51.929	120	.433			
Total	52.849	121				

The result above revealed that the F value of 2.126 is not significant at .147 (P > 0.05). The null hypothesis is accepted, implying that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of parents to the education of the girl-child on the basis of educational background.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study revealed positive attitudes of parents towards the education of the girl-child, but not without dissenting voices.

Hypothesis one revealed that male and female parents do not differ significantly in their attitudes towards the girl-child education. The P-value of .105 however indicates a very weak significant variation. This lend credence to the norm with respect to gender divide over the education of the girl-child. Most female parents and guardians are more favourable disposed to send their daughters to school where as male parents and guardians exhibit a penchant bias in favour of their male children. This is further compounded by the harsh economic situation in the country where very limited resources are available to lower and even some middle income families. Amdii (2003) in her case study of the enrolment trend in Gifted Secondary School, Gwagwalada, Abuja found that from 1998-2002 more male JSS1 students were enrolled in the Gifted Secondary School over the years. This implies that female enrolment was very low all through the years, the highest being 45% in 2002. Nevertheless, the non significant difference in parents' attitudes to the girl-child education on gender basis stems from the cosmopolitan nature of the research setting especially with most of the respondents (68%) possessing tertiary education. This implies the influence of exposure in shaping and moulding attitudes for the better.

In another dimension, parental attitudes to the girl-child education with respect to religious faith revealed a significant difference at .000 level of significance. This affirmed the efficacy of religious orientation on human attitudes in general. No wonder, the standard deviation for item 10 yielded 1.050 against the mean value of 2.106. Some adherents of the Islamic faith may decide to limit their girl-children access to education on the belief that education has the tendency to corrupt the girl-child because of exposure to the opposite sex especially in a co-educational school setting. Perhaps this explain why gender disparity in school enrolment at all levels of education is much wider in the northern part of the country which is predominantly Islam. Interestingly, respondents almost unanimously agreed in item 7 that after all, an educated girl will end up in another family by marriage which means her matrimonial home will stand to reap the gains from her education rather than her parents. These are some of the challenges limiting girls' access to adequate education.

The third hypothesis found no significant difference in parental attitudes to the girl-child education on the basis of educational background. 68% of respondents for this study attained tertiary education, 26.2 attained secondary education, 3.3% attended primary education whereas 2.5% have no formal education. Hence majority of the respondents are well educated, we cannot expect divergent opinions or attitudes among them. Nevertheless the standard deviation for item 4 which states that a boy child deserve better education than a girl-child yielded 1.019 against the mean score of 1.967. This implies that there were dissenting voices of cynicism over the issue.

### **Conclusion**

Nigerian women's access to formal education is still being constrained due to their unfair work load within the household division of labour. Consequently, the realization of the MDG's gender equality and women empowerment targets is being impeded harshly. Such unequal social and gender relations, needs to be transformed in order to take women out of want and poverty. Counseling intervention in this regard is an imperative.

## Recommendations

Counseling intervention to bridge the gender imbalance in school enrolment at all levels of the educational system should be intensified using appropriate approaches as follows:

Guidance counselors and educational psychologists should use role models to modify the behavior and attitudes of parents and the general public in favour of the girl-child education. Thus women that have recorded indelible achievement and have distinguished themselves in their chosen careers or in government can be projected to change negative attitudes to the girl-child in general. The electronic and social media serve as veritable platform in this regard.

Gender studies should be introduced in schools right from the primary school to university level for both sexes to facilitate attitudinal change towards the girl-child education.

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