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Effect of Gender Imbalance in The Enrolment of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated whether preference for private school, socio-economic status of parents/guardian were responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. Furthermore, it compared the perception of respondents from the urban and rural locations of the study area. The causal comparative research design was employed. Target population comprised all teachers and vice principals (Administration) of Junior Secondary Schools making a total of 808. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 170 respondents. A structured survey-questionnaire titled Gender Imbalance Questionnaire on the Enrolment of Student (GIQES) was used to elicit responses. Split-half reliability method used yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.89. Data collected were analyzed with IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 22. The results showed that preference for private school and socio-economic statuses of parents/guardians were significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students. More so, comparison of the perception of respondents at the urban and rural location showed statistical significant difference. Recommendations were proffered.

Keywords: Gender, Imbalance, Enrolment, Public, Secondary Schools, FCT, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The global and national aspirations for gender parity in access to education in Nigeria gains momentum as the days go by. This is chiefly due to the fact that the educational system serves as a vital mechanism for the selection of individuals for their future roles in the society. It is on the platform of schools that this feat could be achieved. According to Haralambos and Holborn (2004), schools operate as meritocratic institutions where the same standards are applied to all students irrespective of ascribed characteristics like social class of origin, family background, race or gender. Schools accomplish the role allocation function by selecting, teaching and examining students to separate them for different occupational roles in their immediate community in particular and the society at large (Obasi, 2009; Akanbi & Akanbi, 2015).

From the foregoing, one should expect that any observable proportions in the males and females access to basic education should reflect the real status quo since males are females accounting for some 50 per cent of the country's population of 140 million (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). Apart from this, one should expect equal gender access to basic education because the United Nations (1948) in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria of 1999 endorsed every individual's right to participate in education irrespective of ethnicity, religion and gender. The participation of individuals in education in Gwagwalada Area Council is directly linked to it; it has over 40 primary and more than 30 public secondary schools of which 17 are Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) spread across the geographical range of the area. JSS is regulated by the FCT Universal Basic Education Board.

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a women or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (United Nations, 2003). It is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. The principle of equality of women and men and the corresponding prohibition of discrimination is a fundamental principle of international human rights law.

The verb meaning to sign up or to register is spelt "Enroll" in the U.S. "Enrol", with one l, is the preferred spelling outside North America. Enrolment in schools represents the largest component of the investment in human capital in most society (Schultz, 2002). Education bestows on the recipients a disposition for a life-long acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills (Aliu, 2010). Hence, rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the calibre of human capital in that country. Education is thus central to the development process.

There are many reasons that could hamper female enrolment in schools. The main reasons that have been documented in various studies include socio-economic, socio-cultural and school related factors. Maluwa-Banda and Kholowa, 2002 as cited in Maluwa-Banda, 2003 reports that socio-economic factors include family poverty, direct cost of schooling. Socio-cultural factors include pregnancies and early marriages, initiation practices, parental attitudes and aspirations for children, household chores, puberty-related issues, death in the family, and caring for the sick parents or relatives. School related factors include distance to school, attitudes and perceptions of teachers and lack of female teachers to act as role models among others.

According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2010) total enrolment of boys and girls into secondary schools in 2009 stood at 6.095 million. In 2010, this number increased by 5.0 percent to 6.4 million. The percentage of girls in secondary schools in 2009 was 45.0 percent about 2.743 million. This increased to 46.0 about 2.944 million in 2010. This indicates that there is a gender dimensions to educational attainment and development in Nigeria.

Over the last two decades, studies have documented the glaring gender inequalities that characterize access and participation in basic education in the country. Most of these studies show that globally, though enrolments in educational institutions have increased, average rates of participation for those of entrance age, still remains low at 25 percent (UNESCO, 2009). For sub-Saharan Africa, the participation rates in higher education remain among the lowest in the world, averaging less than 6 percent for most countries, although the region had experienced the highest rates of growth in terms of students' enrolments (Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2008).

This growth in enrolments has, however, been accompanied by gender disparities in access and participation. Female enrolments and participation in education in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa range between 34 and 38 percent for most countries. These disparities reflect the lower participation and transition rates of female students from lower basic education to higher basic education. Available data shows that though expansion in higher basic education enrolment has led to reductions in gender disparities in most regions, the disparities remain larger in post basic education than in basic education level (UNESCO, 2009).

Data from current surveys show that whereas most countries in sub-Saharan African registered primary school net enrolment rates (NERs) of more than 70 percent, half of the countries have not achieved gender parity in enrolments, with fewer females enrolling and completing the primary school cylcle (UNESCO, 2009). About 58 percent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have differences in primary school participation between males and females that are smaller than 6 percent (Lewin, 2007).

Of concern, however, is that increased access and participation of female students at the primary school level is not necessarily translating to higher enrolments in secondary schools level. Overall, the transition rate from primary to secondary schools in sub-Saharan Africa was 62 percent in 2006, while that of female students was 57 percent (UNESCO, 2009). This notwithstanding, Lewin (2007) study show that in most countries of the region, gender equity measured by the Gender Parity Index (GPI) at primary and secondary school levels varies considerably.

Bello and Oluwadare (2013) found disparities between male and female enrolment in the Nigerian school system and for the study of science courses have a wide gap. The female is seen as being weaker in all fields of endeavours. Parents and society see the female sex as being inferior intellectually, physically and otherwise to her male counterparts.

A study of the enrolment pattern into secretarial studies in Edo State of Nigeria was conducted by Igbinedion (2011) who found that the enrolment into secretarial studies

programmes was generally low even though it was steady. Whereas female enrolment dominated the trend but when subjected to statistical analysis it showed no significant difference between male and female. It was recommended that more male students should be encouraged to enroll into secretarial studies programme.

In similar vein, Rahji and Fakayode (2012) examined school enrolment and gender gap for rural household children at the secondary levels. A multi-stage sampling technique was used in data collection. Probit model analysis was used in analyzing the data set. Evidence from the analysis indicated that more boys were enrolled than girls. Father's education variable is significant for boys. This variable is marginally significant for girls. The probit model predicted a gender gap of 18.72. The results indicated that most of the gap is due to differences in the ways households perceive male and female children. There is a preference for boys over girls in secondary school enrolment. Based on the findings of this study, incentives for the enrolment of girls were recommended. These include: differential fees or free tuition, and increased public subsidies for female education at this level.

In a comparative assessment, Lawal (2012) studied the enrolment trend of students who enrolled for western education and Islamic education and reported a significant preference for Islamic education by identified community in Kaduna State. Balarabe (2013) documented that home background had significant effect on intelligence and personality among university medical students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Suleiman (2013) reported significant effects of socio-economic status of parents on students' enrolment in Sheik Hamdan Islamic school. In-spite of the perceived low income level of parents/guardians, they were satisfied sending their wards to this school because of perceived gains. James (2014) investigated the causes for decreasing enrolments of female students in secondary schools in Niger State and found that preference for private schools and the socio-economic status of parents/guardians were significant factors.

However, Owosen (2014) assessed secondary schools enrolment pattern of the urban and non-urban schools in Kwara State and reported a wide gap between the two locations with the urban schools having the lead. In another development, Benson (2014) found out that more females from the IDP camps enrolled in nearby secondary schools than their male counterparts when he studied the effects of insurgency on the enrolment of students from the IDP camps in FCT Abuja.

The literature reviewed indicates that there has been gender imbalance in the enrolment of students both at the secondary and tertiary school levels perpetuated mostly by the bias in the minds of parents/guardians in particular and the society at large. This has a multiplier effect on public secondary schools in Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT Abuja.

Statement of the Problem

There has been a consistent cry for the players in the international, national and local economic settings to adopt a pragmatic approach to enforce affirmative action plans that strictly guarantee equal gender quota in all spheres of human endeavor. Existing statistical data shows a huge gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in the Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. The effect of this recorded imbalance is enormous yet mind boggling. In Gwagwalada Area Council in particular and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja in general, all Junior Secondary Schools have "public" status. Could parents'/guardians'/students' preference for faith-based schooling (given the religious inclination of the people) be responsible for the

perceived imbalance? The researcher is further worried about the socio-economic status of parents/guardians as also being a possible factor that could be responsible for the parity in the enrolment of students into the Junior Secondary School in the study area.

Purpose of the Study

The overall purpose of this study is to examine the effects of gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. Moreover, it seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To investigate if preference for private school is responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in JSS in Gwagwalada Area Council.
- To establish if socio-economic status of parents/guardians is responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in JSS in Gwagwalada Area Council.
- To compare the perception of respondents from the urban location and rural location of the study area.

Hypotheses

The following postulated hypotheses guided the study:

- Preference for private school is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in JSS in Gwagwalada Area Council.
- Socio-economic status of parents/guardians is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in JSS in Gwagwalada Area Council.
- The perception of respondents at the urban location and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance is not significantly different.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted ex-post facto research design. The target population comprised all Teachers and Vice Principals (Administration) of Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria making a total of 808. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select 170 (one hundred and seventy) samples for the study. The researcher designed a structured survey-questionnaire titled Gender Imbalance Questionnaire on the Enrolment of Student (GIQES) to elicit responses based on the identified variables of the study. Specifically, likert four point scale (Strongly Agree with a rating weight of 4, Agree with a rating weight of 3, Disagree with a rating weight of 2 and Strongly Disagree with a rating weight of 1) was adopted. Generally, Part A of the instrument generated demographic/personal data of the respondents while Part B generated data on effect of gender imbalance.

Items on B1 and B2 were fitted into the 4-point likert scale of Strongly Disagree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1) were calculated by finding the mean (threshold) of the individual weight of the response options; one plus two plus three plus four divided by the number of options (1+2+3+4/4 = 2.5). This value (2.5) was used in interpreting the mean value indices of the variables of the study. A mean score of 2.5 was taken as moderate

index also showing the minimum acceptance level. The mean score below 2.5 was taken as low index while any score above 2.5 was taken as high index.

The developed instrument (Gender Imbalance Questionnaire-GIQES) was content-validated. Split-half reliability method was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the internal consistency and stability of the instrument through data gathered from the pilot study. It was administered face–to–face to respondents in their respective schools and analyzed with IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 22. The analyses consisted of descriptive analysis, t-statistic and F-statistic in testing the postulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Preference for private school is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council.

Table 1 shows a statistically significant result; the test statistic t is equal to 57.554 at 0.05 level of significance with 169 degrees of freedom. From this result, t_{cal} is greater than t_{tab} i.e. 57.55 > 2.060. Therefore the H_O that preference for private school is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council is rejected. More so, the mean differences (Qp1 – 3.44, Qp2 – 3.37, Qp3 – 3.31, Qp4 – 3.21 and Qp5 -3.29) presented in the table above show that they were above the threshold of 2.5 therefore strengthening the alternate hypothesis.

Table 1: One-Sample Test-Preference for Private School

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Qp1	61.513	169	.000	3.441	3.33	3.55
Qp2	62.454	169	.000	3.365	3.26	3.47
Qp3	56.567	169	.000	3.312	3.20	3.43
Qp4	50.632	169	.000	3.213	3.09	3.34
Qp5	56.606	169	.000	3.294	3.18	3.41
t_{cal}	57.554					

Hypothesis Two: Socio-economic status of parents/guardians is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council.

Information in Table 2 revealed statistically significant result; the test statistic t is equal to 47.674 at 0.05 level of significance, with 169 degrees of freedom. From this result, t_{cal} is greater than t_{tab} i.e. 47.67 > 2.060. Therefore the H_O that socio-economic status of parents/guardians is not significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council is rejected. Item 6 of the instrument denoted by Qs6 has the highest magnitude of mean difference (3.41) then Qs7 (3.39), Qs10 (3.34), Qs11 (2.95), Qs8 (2.75) and Qs9 (2.52).

Table 2: One-Sample Test – Socio-economic Status of Parents/guardians

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Qs6	62.619	169	.000	3.406	3.30	3.51
Qs7	60.443	169	.000	3.394	3.28	3.50
Qs8	34.315	169	.000	2.747	2.59	2.91
Qs9	30.603	169	.000	2.518	2.36	2.68
Qs10	56.007	169	.000	3.335	3.22	3.45
Qs11	42.059	169	.000	2.953	2.81	3.09
t_{cal}	**47.674**					

Hypothesis Three: The perception of respondents at the urban location and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance is not significantly different.

The results on Table 3 revealed that the differences in the mean scores observed at different levels of the questionnaire items on the comparison of the perception of respondents at the urban and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance does not show statistical significant difference.

Table 3: One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Difference in the Perception of Respondents at the Urban and Rural Location

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Qp1	Between Groups	.597	1	.597	1.123	.291*
	Within Groups	89.315	168	.532		
	Total	89.912	169			
Qp2	Between Groups	1.121	1	1.121	2.290	.132*
	Within Groups	82.267	168	.490		
	Total	83.388	169			
Qp3	Between Groups	1.384	1	1.384	2.394	.124*
	Within Groups	97.093	168	.578		
	Total	98.476	169			
Qp4	Between Groups	2.077	1	2.077	3.090	.081*
	Within Groups	112.255	168	.672		
	Total	114.331	169			
Qp5	Between Groups	2.451	1	2.451	4.342	.039*
	Within Groups	94.843	168	.565		
	Total	97.294	169			
Qp6	Between Groups	0.251	1	.251	.497	.482*
	Within Groups	84.744	168	.504		
	Total	84.994	169			
Qp7	Between Groups	.578	1	.578	1.079	.301*
	Within Groups	90.016	168	.536		
	Total	90.594	169			
Qp8	Between Groups	1.152	1	1.152	1.058	.305*
	Within Groups	182.972	168	1.089		
	Total	184.124	169			
Qp9	Between Groups	.547	1	.547	.474	.492*
	Within Groups	193.900	168	1.154		

	Total	194.447	169			
Qp10	Between Groups	1.843	1	1.843	3.095	.080*
	Within Groups	100.045	168	.596		
	Total	101.888	169			
Qp11	Between Groups	.035	1	.035	.042	.838*
	Within Groups	141.588	168	.843		
	Total	141.624	169			

Not significant; p* > .05

DISCUSSION

The results show that preference for private school is significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. The inhabitants of Gwagwalada especially the indigenes are very religious people as clearly expressed in the background to the study. This means that their high preference for faith-based/private school is partly responsible for the gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in the public schools. Many female students are guided by parents/guardians to attend these private schools. This finding corroborates the results reported by (James, 2014; Suleiman, 2013 and Lawal, 2012).

It is true that schools owned by the government are relatively cheap because of special subventions and grants. Therefore it is expected that many students with low economic background would avail themselves of enrolment opportunity. The reverse is the case as many female students are guided by parents / guardians to attend faith-based school because of the need to maintain a high level of moral standards which is lacking in public schools.

The results of the analyzed data for hypothesis two showed that socio-economic status of parents/guardians is significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. The results on Qs6, Qs7, Qs8, Qs9, Qs10 and Qs11 are quite revealing. The cost of acquiring recommended books in the school is very high for some low-income earning parents. Older female siblings are required to stay back and care for younger ones and cook at home. Furthermore, female children are required to spend more time at the farm and home garden. Income of most parents does not meet the basic needs of the family units. Low-income earning parents derive economic benefits through early marriage of their female children. The cost of acquiring schooling uniform is relatively very high for some low-income earning parents. This finding is in harmony with that of Balarabe (2013) who documented that home background had significant effect on intelligence and personality among university medical students in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The results on the third hypothesis indicated that perception of respondents at the urban and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance is not significantly different.

The ANOVA test ran on hypothesis three showed no statistically significant difference (Not significant; p* > .05) at 169 degrees of freedom and .05 level of significance. This result further revealed that the differences in mean scores observed at different levels of the questionnaire items on the comparison of the perception of respondents at the urban and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance does not show statistical significant difference. On overall note, the responses gotten from respondents at both urban and rural settings turned out without difference; observations were common at both locations. This result is far from Owosen (2014) who assessed secondary schools enrolment pattern of the urban and non-urban

schools in Kwara State and reported a wide gap between the two locations with the urban schools taking the lead.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study were quite revealing. The results of the analysis ran on the first hypothesis showed that preference for private school was significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council. This means that high preference for faith-based/private school by parents/guardians and students is partly responsible for the gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in the public schools.

The results of the analyzed data for hypothesis two showed that socio-economic status of parents/guardians is significantly responsible for gender imbalance in the enrolment of students in Junior Secondary Schools in Gwagwalada Area Council.

Comparison of the perception of respondents at the urban and rural location of the study area on gender imbalance did not show statistical significant difference. Responses from respondents at both urban and rural settings turned out without difference; observations were common at both locations.

Education enables people to use and extend their capabilities, develop skills, improve their livelihoods and increase their earning potential. And it also empowers them to participate in decision-making and in the transformation of their lives and societies. Education is central to the achievement of greater equality in the society.

Analysis of gender patterns of access to higher basic (JSS) education revealed that more male students are enrolled in most schools than female students hence an imbalance. A care-free approach to gender development issues may not likely yield the much expected global and national aspirations to smooth out the perceived imbalance in the enrolment of students in the public secondary schools.

Deliberate efforts need to be put in place to move away from paying lip-service to gender issues and begin to act in gender sensitive way at all levels; from policy-making to school system implementation. However, it is pertinent that gender imbalance cannot be totally healed but can be systematically reduced to the barest level.

Implications for Counselling

The evidence is quite clear that counsellors have a vital role to play in the girl-child education. Our educational system especially at the junior secondary school level needs counselling for optimal performance and appropriate interpersonal relationship for the improvement of the girl-child education in the Territory.

There is the need to counsel and enlighten religious leaders on the importance of girl-child education. Group counselling will provide an effective means of providing enlightenment campaign; need to dispel certain beliefs concerning the girl-child education especially in the hinter lands or suburbs. This could be achieved through radio, television stations and other print media just the way Nigerians were enlightened on the Ebola virus and its attendance consequences.

Counsellors should provide focus group counselling services with girls that are out of school and parents of such girls with a view of understanding their options about the education of

the girl-child and attempt to encourage and motivate the group on the need to educate the girl-child. Counsellors should visit relevant agencies and nongovernmental organizations and partner with them to ensure that they assist in mobilizing and enlightening the general public, parents/ guardians through advocacy on the dangers inherent in early marriage, child labour, trafficking and street hawking of the girl child and provide the benefits in educating the girl child based on the slogan "that whoever educates a girl-child has educated the nation".

There is also the need to provide counselling services for parents and elders in the rural areas through public enlightenment campaigns and guidance programmes aimed at eliminating social, religious and economic barriers to education of the girl-child to reduce gender imbalance in school enrolment in our secondary schools in the Territory. This could be achieved through family counselling for healthy, safe, protective and friendly environment in order to ensure that a stimulating learning environment is where all the girl-child could optimize their potentials.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Regulatory agencies and management authorities should make higher basic education more attractive by laying emphasis on moral instructions.
- The FCT Secondary Education Board in conjunction with the management of Junior Secondary Schools should roll out special incentives for parents/guardians who personally present their female children for enrolment in the schools especially at the rural area.

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