

Parents' Perceptions of Primary School Enrolment in Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The main aim of this study was to investigate the differences in the enrolment pattern of males and females in the primary school on one hand and to examine parents' perceptions of the causes of sex differences in the enrolment pattern on the other. The descriptive survey design was employed and a total of 20 Universal Basic Education schools were randomly selected from 73 schools in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. Data was obtained from 20 head teachers and 194 purposively selected literate parents using a self-designed instrument titled 'Gender Enrolment Disparity Questionnaire' (GEDQ). The data were analyzed using percentages, mean scores and t-test. The study revealed that the females constituted 6,343 (52.6 percent) and the males 5,714 (47.4 percent). It also revealed that male and female parents were not significantly different in their perceptions of the causes of low-male enrolment ($t=1.42$; $p>0.05$). Based on the findings, recommendations were made.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education is an important determinant of the success or failure of the other tiers of the educational system. It is referred to as that form of education provided in an institution of learning for children aged six and eleven years plus and which lasts for six years (Oroka 2005). Statistics on school attendance conducted in Nigeria in 2003 shows that 60.1 percent of children of primary school age were attending primary school at the time of the survey, of which 63.7 percent were male and 56.5 percent female (Affe 2008). This is in spite of the Universal Basic Education (U.B.E.) law which emphasized that education is compulsory for children under a particular age in which they can have unfettered education from basic one to six and junior secondary one to three. The goals and objectives of primary education as seen in the National Policy on Education (2004) are fostered through:

- I. inculcating permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively;
- II. laying a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- III. giving citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contributing to the life of the society;
- IV. moulding the character and developing sound attitude and morals in the child;

- V. developing in the child the ability to adapt to the child's changing environment;
- VI. giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity; and
- VII. providing the child with basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and crafts locally.

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 'enrolment' refers to the act of officially arranging to join a school, university or course. In other words, it is perceived as the ability of pupils to register or have access to an organized school programme. Gender enrolment is defined by this study as the number of boys and girls registered in the primary school in 2011 when this study was undertaken.

The rationale for investigating patterns of enrolment between boys and girls of primary school age was based on the report by UNICEF (2003) which showed that the number of girls out of school had risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. Furthermore, girls' attendance in school is said to be low especially in the developing countries, and that 5million

Nigerian children aged 6-11 years do not have access to primary education (UNICEF 2007). While 95 percent of boys and girls attend primary school in the developed countries, only 60

percent do so in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wikipedia 2011). Similarly, other studies have reported that there are differences in the enrolment pattern of boys and girls (Okeke et al. 2008; Offorma 2009). In particular, Offorma (2009) found that millions of girls have no access to school with reasons such as child labour, poverty, lack of sponsorship, truancy, engagement of children as house helps among others. In addition, boys are said to be better favoured over girls due to the fact that boys would perpetuate the family name (Offorma 2009). Similarly, the net primary school enrolment for which Nigeria ranks 125th out of 20 countries indicated that it had 63 percent in 2005 with 8 million primary school aged children not enrolled in school (World Economic Forum 2008; World Bank 2008d). In this situation, there is the likelihood that poverty will increase, even as the International Monetary Fund (2007) reports that the number of people below poverty line has fallen from 70 percent in 1999 to 54 percent in 2005. This is magnified by the fact that over half of Nigeria's population is living on less than US \$1 per day (IMF 2007).

Unfortunately, constraints toward achieving maximum school attendance are embedded in poverty, cultural attitude, sex-based discriminations, religion, amongst others. For instance, Affe (2008) lamented the poverty level in Nigeria which forced some children to prefer hawking or begging on the streets to sustain their homes. In most societies, gender disparity in education, employment and career is a common phenomenon. This is informed by the awareness in the news and print media. Ambakederemo (2006: 274) reporting on the value of children among 600 rural parents found that majority of adults believe boys to be more productive than girls and that boys should be given preferential treatment. Hence, issues relating to enrolment are not excluded from such beliefs. To this end, the assumption underlying this study is that far more boys than girls are enrolled in the primary school. This is also seen in findings from previous studies (Ekekwe 2001; Maisamari 2002).

For instance, the net enrolment ratio in Nigeria is estimated to be 74 percent for boys and 56 percent for girls. This means that the national gap is 18 percent in favour of boys. In the same vein, Okoosi-Simbine (2000) emphasizes the report of UNICEF which shows that in 68 out of 83 developing countries, enrolment ratios for girls are lower than that of boys for primary school,

and that Nigeria ranks 18 out of 38 African nations with respect to females per 100 males. To this end, he noted that educational deprivation of the girl-child is a common phenomenon in developing countries despite that many of them are signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that everyone has a right to education. This discriminatory practice in education of the girl-child portends danger for Nigeria. This is because if the women folk who constitute almost half of the nation's population are neglected, Nigeria might suffer the loss of the contributions of this set of people economically, scientifically and otherwise. The discriminatory attitude towards the enrolment of the girl-child in the primary school will also constitute a negative impact on the secondary education.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were to:

1. investigate the pattern of enrolment between males and females in the primary school.
2. examine parents' perceptions of the causes of sex differences in the pattern of enrolment.

The study was guided by the following research questions and hypothesis:

1. What is the pattern of enrolment of male and female primary school pupils?
2. What are the perceived causes of the differences in the pattern of enrolment of the male and female pupils by parents?

The following null hypothesis was tested:

1. There is no significant difference between male and female parents in their perceptions of the causes of the differences in male and female enrolment in the primary school.

METHODOLOGY

The design employed was the Descriptive Survey which elicited responses from head teachers of primary schools on the pattern of enrolment between males and females and parents' perceptions of the causes of the disparity in the enrolment. The population of the study comprised all the 65,700 primary school pupils in Port Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. Port Harcourt has 73 U.B.E. schools spread geographically across 15 locations. The researcher ran-

domly selected 20 U.B.E. schools from five locations in the area namely Rebisi, Orogbum, Oro-Evo, Elekahia and Diobu. The sample consisted of 10 literate parents purposively selected from each of the 20 schools, making a total of 200 parents. The characteristics of the sample showed that on the basis of gender, 76(39.2 percent) male and 118(60.8 percent) female parents participated in the study. The justification for selecting literate parents was due to their ability to understand and respond to the questionnaire. In all, 20 head teachers of the schools provided details of the enrolment pattern of their pupils and 194 literate parents who returned their questionnaire forms participated in the study.

Instrument and Method of Data Collection

Data for gender enrolment was derived from enrolment records provided by each of the 20 head teachers. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire, titled 'Gender Enrolment Disparity Questionnaire' (GEDQ). Section A comprises personal data of the respondents and Section B consists of seven statements on causes of low-male enrolment, which were derived from literature. The response and scoring pattern was: Strongly

Agree (SA)=4, Agree (A)=3, Disagree (D)=2 and Strongly Disagree (SD)=1.

The instrument was scrutinized by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Nigeria. A pilot test conducted using 20 parents yielded a Pearson (r) of 0.69 after an interval of two weeks. Permission was duly sought from the school heads before the questionnaire forms were administered personally by the researcher, with the assistance of the Primary Five teachers. Simple percentages were used in analyzing the pattern of male and female enrolment, and mean scores in comparing the degree of agreement or disagreement of respondents to the causes of low-male enrolment in the primary school. A decision cut off mean score of 2.5 and above or below was used in determining an item as favourable or unfavourable. The t-test was used to analyze the hypothesis comparing male and female parents' perceptions of the causes of low-male enrolment.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that out of 20 schools investigated, 13 had more female than male pupils enrolled. The overall enrolment estimate was

Table 1: Pattern of male and female enrolment in the primary school (N= 20)

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of school</i>	<i>Male (Freq. and %)</i>	<i>Female (Freq. and %)</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
1.	Police Children Sch., I, PH.	300 (41.4%)	425 (58.6%)	Female *
2.	Police Children Sch., II PH.	349 (51%)	335 (49%)	Male
3.	State Sch II Rebisi, PH.	260 (49.5%)	265 (50.5%)	Female *
4.	Salvation Army State Sch., PH.	232 (53%)	206 (47%)	Male
5.	Banham Model Pry Sch., PH.	226 (41%)	330 (59%)	Female *
6.	Holy Trinity State Sch., PH.	257 (43%)	336 (57%)	Female *
7.	Comm Pry Sch OroEvo, PH.	381 (44%)	489 (56%)	Female *
8.	Army Children Sch. I, PH.	229 (40%)	339 (60%)	Female *
9.	Army Children Sch II, PH.	212 (46%)	248 (54%)	Female *
10.	Army Children Sch III, PH.	216 (51%)	207 (49%)	Male
11.	Army Children Sch IV, PH.	112 (53%)	101 (47%)	Male
12.	State Sch I, Orogbum, PH.	175 (47%)	198 (53%)	Female *
13.	State Sch II, Orogbum, PH.	105 (42%)	143 (58%)	Female *
14.	State Sch III, Orogbum, PH.	932 (49.8%)	940 (50.2%)	Female *
15.	State Sch IV, Rebisi, PH.	284 (55%)	235 (45%)	Male
16.	Township Sch III, PH.	286 (48%)	305 (52%)	Female *
17.	St. Paul Sch I, Diobu, PH.	369 (45%)	450 (55%)	Female *
18.	State Sch I, Diobu, PH.	238 (47%)	272 (53%)	Female *
19.	State Sch II, Diobu, PH.	281 (51%)	266 (49%)	Male
20.	Comm Pry Sch II Elekahia, PH.	270 (52%)	253 (48%)	Male
	Total=	5714(47.4%)	6343(52.6%)	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Note: Columns with Asterisk (*) shows that more female pupils were enrolled.

Table 2: Parents' Perceptions of the causes of low-male enrolment in the primary school

S. No.	Statement Low-male enrolment is caused by:	Response categories (N=194)				
		SA	A	D	SD	Mean
1.	Engaging the boy-child in trading activities	91	81	9	13	3.42
2.	Parents' low level of education	122	38	3	9	3.29
3.	Negative attitude towards education	103	36	25	30	3.08
4.	Poverty	104	27	41	20	3.05
5.	Withdrawal of the boy-child from school	79	52	49	14	3.00
6.	Craze for wealth	89	33	30	42	2.89
7.	Religion, forcing the boy-child to attend Koranic school	53	47	59	35	2.62

Table 3: t-test comparing male and female parents' perceptions of low-male enrolment

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal.t	Crit.t
Low-male enrolment	Male	76	43.16	17.21	192	1.42	1.96
	Female	118	36.29	15.14		N.S	

N.S.= Not Significant; t=1.42; p> 0.05

5,714 (47.4 percent) males and 6,343 (52.6 percent) females. Based on the outcome of the result whereby more female than male pupils enrolled in the primary school, the perceptions of parents were sought on the causes of low-male enrolment.

Table 2 shows that the top five causes of low-male enrolment in the primary school as perceived by parents were: engaging the boy-child in trading activities (3.42), parents' low level of education (3.29), negative attitude of parents towards education (3.08), poverty (3.05) and withdrawal of the boy-child from school (3.00).

The result in Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.42 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at the 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is no significant difference between male and female parents in their perceptions of the causes of low-male enrolment in the primary school.

DISCUSSION

The first research question which sought to find out the pattern of male and female enrolment in the primary school as shown in Table 1 reveals that more females than males enrolled in 13 out of 20 schools investigated in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The enrolment figures on the average were 5,714 (47.4%) male and 6,343 (52.6%) female. This shows 5.2 percent increase in favour of the female. The head teachers interviewed revealed that the outcome was probably because

girls have a higher population than boys and that some parents prefer to engage male children for hawking and store keeping. They also observed that there is depreciation in the enrolment of male pupils as they advanced in class especially in Primary 4 and 5. This finding corroborates those of Ekekwe (2001) and Maisamari (2002) who reported that more girls than boys were enrolled in schools in Anambra State of Nigeria due to involvement of the boys in trading. The present study also agrees with that of Polelo (2003) who found that more girls are enrolled by parents in Botswana as a result of the boys' contributions in rearing cattle in rural economy. The study further confirms the submissions of the Universal Basic Education Commission (2003) which indicated that more boys were out of school, especially in Eastern Nigeria due to preference for trade, quest for money, parental decision among others. Similarly, this finding was corroborated by Offorma (2009), suggesting that more girls than boys were enrolled in 3 out of 5 states investigated in Eastern Nigeria.

The second research question on perceived causes of low-male enrolment as seen in Table 2 shows that the top five causes indicated by parents in rank order included engaging the boy-child in trading activities (3.42), parents' low level of education (3.29), parents' negative attitude towards education (3.08), poverty (3.05) and withdrawal of the boy-child from the school (3.00). The finding justifies that of Maisamari (2002) which reported that male children's attitude to-

wards education in Anambra State of Nigeria is not encouraging as a result of their love for business venture, resulting in their exit from school. One other reason why there was a depreciation in male enrolment could be as a result of the males dropping out of school in order to be engaged in menial jobs such as store keepers, loaders and farm helpers due to poverty in some families. Thus, working rather than schooling enables them to supplement their family income. Moreover, the population of pupils in the public primary schools are mainly wards of families and as such are subject to their masters especially when such guardians who may be government workers are transferred to other states, they take their wards along with them.

The result of hypothesis one in Table 3 comparing male and female parents' perceptions of low-male enrolment shows that they were not significantly different. The reason for the similarity in their perceptions could be as a result of the awareness generated by gender issues via the news and print media and a few NGOs. Being literate also gives them the ability to analyze issues logically. More so, Maisamari (2006) observed from records that girls who succeed in remaining in school excel.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that there were differences in male and female enrolment in the primary school, judging from the enrolment figures provided by the head teachers in the schools where the study was conducted. Although previous enrolment patterns were in favour of the male, there is still a lot to be done by stakeholders and the government in maintaining a reasonable balance in the pattern of enrolment between male and female pupils while planning sensitization programmes for parents and other stake holders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are necessary in the reduction of low-male enrolment in the primary school:-

1. Counselling should be employed in modifying parents' negative behaviour towards education. Since fewer males than females enrolled in the primary school,

counsellors should target young male school-age children and their parents for enlightenment programmes through lectures and workshops, stressing the importance of enrolling the male gender which includes national development, future leaders at home and work. The campaign should be given better coverage in the news and print media. Specifically, the society should be educated on issues associated with low-male enrolment by helping them to inculcate right attitudes and values towards their children's education and future.

Therefore, the researcher advocates for the use of Rational Emotive Therapy, which seeks to replace one's irrational or illogical beliefs with a more logical one.

2. The Government and policy makers should address the problem of low-male enrolment in the primary school in Rivers State of Nigeria. One way of doing this is by providing pamphlets for disseminating information to the masses about the ill effects of enlisting young children, especially the male as hawkers. Government should also provide more jobs for parents who use their male children for boosting their economic income.
3. The Ministry of Education should liaise with the Federal and State Governments for the provision of free meals and school buses in achieving free Universal Basic Education which will further encourage parents and children to consider education as the best option to attaining material wealth.

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