Culture and the Education of Female Children in Gwer West Local Government Area of Benue State

Ahoo Terhile Jude
Kings Model College, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.
Correspondence to: Ahoo T. J. Email: ahoojterhile@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Education is a fundamental right of all children and indispensable to societal transformation. Currently, there is increased enrolment of female children into schools. However, preliminary studies have failed to clearly outline the role which culture is playing in driving this change.

Objectives: The study sought to: examine attitudes towards the education of female children; find out cultural changes affecting the education of female children; and determine the effects of girl-child education on the development of Gwer West local government area of Benue State.

Methodology: Descriptive survey research design was adopted to achieve the objectives of this study. A sample 400 respondents were selected from the total population of 122,313 people. Purposive, simple and random sampling techniques were used in the selection of council wards and respondents for study. Simple percentages were used to describe the data while Chi-Square test of independence was used to test the association between the variables of interest. Results were presented in tables.

Results: It was found that respondents (42.7%) showed interest in educating all children regardless of sex. This is due to the significant changes in cultural practices like early/child marriages, preference for the education of male children and the view that girl-child education is unrewarding. Responses (60.5%) indicated that girl-child education can promote socio-economic development. Chi-square test indicated a significant relationship between the occupation of parents and their perception towards gender preference for the education of their children.

Unique Contribution: This study has provided empirical evidence indicating that culture and education are linked. The form of cultural disposition – positive/negative – towards child education influences the way boys and girls access education. This information will be useful in designing and implementing campaigns on girl child education in Nigeria. .

Definite Conclusion: Aspects of culture that hampered girl-child education have changed, allowing equal educational opportunities for all children.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends the sustenance of cultural behaviours that promote equal educational opportunities for boys and girls.

Keywords: Culture, Girl-child Education, Female, Children, Gwer West, Enrolment, Cultural change, Development.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of all children and is indispensable to the transformation of every society. It provides individuals with the opportunity to maximize their full potentials and play relevant roles in the advancement of their communities. Education equips individuals with the basic skills and understanding, relevant for societal transformation. It is, in fact, the greatest investment which can be provided by any nation for the growth and development of the resources within it (Javed *et al.,* 2016). Even so, educational opportunities have not been equal to both male and female children in many societies of Africa; hence debates about the unequal access of children to opportunities in education continue to intensify (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020; Rustad & Ostby, 2017; Girls' Education in Nigeria Report [GENR], 2014).

In Nigeria, education grew rapidly attractive particularly among the rural dwellers, following the declining economic activities of the early 1980s. This led to the substantial increase in the enrolment of children into educational institutions across the country. At the pre-primary level of education, there was an increase in the Net Enrolment Ration (NER) in the years 2003/2004 from 10.9 per cent to 18.1 per cent in 2009/2010. Within the period, 50.7% males and 49.3% females were enrolled. At the primary school level, the overall enrolments for children of box sexes (male and female) stood at 19,151,438; 25,773,044; 19,992,309 and 20,663,805 for the years 2000, 2003, 2008 and 2010 respectively. Over the same period, there was progress in enrolment into secondary schools, as the total annual enrolments progressed from 2,277,291 in the year 2000 to 3,624,163; 2,934,972; 3,476,063 and 5,010,227 for the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2010 respectively (National Population Commission [NPC] (Nigeria) and RTI International, 2016).

Children's increased access to formal education has been as a result of the realization that education is not just among the most relevant tools in social and economic empowerment, but has cascading benefits, especially for women and girls: they are unlikely to die during child delivery, not vulnerable to preventable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, better informed to defend themselves and families against all forms of violence against them. Educated women and girls are better predisposed to having literate, healthy and controllable family size (Illo *et al*, 2014).

The barriers to sound education which female children face include lack of finance, poor implementation of teaching methodology, child labour and trafficking, diseases/illnesses, poor educational infrastructure, and gender discrimination (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013). Efforts geared at minimizing these challenges are usually confronted with stiff resistance due to practices and values such as poor priority for girl's education, perception that educating a female child is contrary to established traditional modes of behaviour, the practice of early or child marriages, etc (Jimo, *et al*, 2018; UNESCO, 2008).

There have been promulgations of several treaties and declarations aimed at achieving United Nations' (UN) goal of enforcing the fundamental rights of all individuals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for instance, reaffirmed the world's dedication towards realizing equal education for all, especially among women and girls by the year 2030 (Somani, 2017). Consequently, there has been progress, albeit minimal, in enrolment for primary school-aged girls, with out-of-school rates dropping from 58 percent in 2000 to 52 percent in 2015 (Somani, 2017) worldwide. In Nigeria, the proportion of primary school enrolment improved marginally from 43.46% in 2004, 43.79% in 2005 to 45.36% in 2006 while enrolments into secondary schools improved slightly from 45.9% in 2014 to 46% in 2016 (Salami *et al*, 2019).

Studies (Chingtham & Guite, 2017; Irigoyen, 2017; Nkosha *et al*., 2013; Saleh & Kwache, 2012; Department for International Development [DFID], 2005) identified several factors responsible for changing pattern of child education. These include levels of women's education and empowerment (Chingtham & Guite, 2017), enforcement of the 50-50 Enrolment Policy and conversion of boys-only-schools to accommodate children of both sexes (Nkosha *et al*., 2013). Similarly, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme launched in Nigeria in 1999 and improved financial and political commitment by the government ((Irigoyen, 2017) has ensured improved girl-child school enrolment. Despite the improvements in levels of school enrolment for girls, educational systems in developing countries are still experiencing gender gaps (Somani, 2017). In spite of this, aspects of culture pervade human life and play determining roles in conducting affairs of man including access to education. Even so, preliminary investigations have failed to identify the role of culture in the pattern of education among male and female children.

The study therefore, determined the role of culture in the education of female children in Gwer West Local Government Area (LGA). Specifically, the study examined attitudes towards the education of female children in Gwer West LGA; found out the cultural changes affecting the

education of female children in Gwer West LGA; and determined the effects of girl-child education on the development of Gwer West LGA.

Literature review
Culture

Edward Tylor, a British anthropologist, first defined culture around 1872 as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'(Erinosho, 2005). Culture is a reflection of the life and style of a group of people at a given period of time. The term refers to what a people believe, the way they interact, how they dress, eat as well as their attitude towards people and things. These features are usually unique to the people and are often shared by members of the group. According to Spencer-Oatey (2012), people are not born with the cultural behaviours they exhibit, but behave the way they do through learning.

Sibani (2018) opines that an encompassing definition of culture is sees as a term which offers the context, values, subjectivity, attitudes and skills on which the development process must take place. Culture involves the harmonization of certain desired features of other cultures. That is to say, culture is actually an agglomeration of behavioural patterns of people from different social backgrounds. Importantly, culture is a dynamic process: aspects of culture which are created for particular purposes may be recreated or modified by the same people when their desires are no longer met by the existing values and practices.

Education

The etymology of the word "education" can be traced to the Latin word *"educere"*, meaning "to lead out". Broadly, education may be an act or experience with the potential to influence the mind, character and the physical qualities of a person. It is a practice by which a people carefully transfer the knowledge, skills and values which have overtime been accumulated from one generation to another.

Education is an illuminating force. It is a perceived light capable of driving away the darkness of ignorance and creating the right channels for man to achieve development and civilization. UNESCO (2008) conceptualise education as a comprehensive procedure in building the overall capacity, ability and behaviour of the individual so as to be better able to overcome challenges and advance societal growth and development. Education is a veritable tool for solving man's problems, improving his wellbeing and ensuring a comfortable life. In fact, it is an indispensable tool for the survival of man (Okorie, 2017).

According to Fafunwa (1994), education is a combination of the processes by which children or young adults develop sound abilities and attitudes that can entrench positive values and ensure the growth of society in which they live. By implication, the requisite skills for interpersonal relationship, social adjustment, personal and social advancement as well as the basic ideas for peace, justice and development are deposited into the child through the instrumentality of education. Education, therefore, ensures cultural continuity, social control and can reasonably guarantee a more rational trajectory for society (Javed *et al*,, 2016). Educated people have been found to attract a wide array of positive outcomes into their lives and communities. For instance, they have better access to healthcare, earn significant salaries and in turn pay huge taxes, participate effectively in political activities in their communities, identify problems and proffer good solutions to them, and they have a better predisposition towards foreigners (Javed *et al*., 2016; Jungho, 2016; Fielding, 2014).

Culture and Girl-child education

Cultural behaviour essentially determines to what extent boys and girls access formal education. Cultural behaviours such as child/early marriage, son preference and so on pose serious challenges to the educational prospects of the girl-child (Akinbi & Akinbi, 2015). Other practices such as cultural initiations account for the inaccessibility, low participation and the withdrawal of female children from school. Ahmad and Najeemah (2013), observed that some families restrain their daughters from school when they menstruate for the first time, and after a successful initiation ceremony. The girl-child thus encounters challenges in continuing education due to the perception that they have become adults and should go into marriage.

Negative cultural practices and perceptions against women and girls such as son preference, virginity testing, arranged marriages, female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C), widow inheritance and/or abandonment, child/early marriage and non-enrolment or withdrawal from schools (Jimoh, *et al*, 2018; Nagar *et al.*, 2017) affect the chances of girls enjoying quality life and education, and further exposes them to risks of avoidable health challenges and social vices (Chukwu *et al.*, 2014; Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013).

Changes in culture and the pattern of child education in Nigeria

Like other aspects of society, culture also changes. Older habits are modified, replaced and new ones have emerged. Behaviours and practices that were once acceptable may no longer be permissible in the contemporary social setting, as they may be deemed outdated and irrelevant. The killing of twins, for instance, was common among the Ibibio of present-day Cross River State, Nigeria, but is no longer practised (Corbett, 2018).

Traditional African and indeed Nigerian cultural values such as brotherhood, love, honesty, hard work and respect for elders which were once held sacred and sacrosanct may still persist but there are rapid and pervasive changes in favour of materialism, thus breeding dishonesty, greed, hate, disrespect for elders and so on (Sibani, 2018). These changes have resulted from cultural diffusion, where contact between people of different cultures results in the exchange of values, habits and behavioural patterns (Wahab *et al.*, 2012; World Health Organization [WHO], 2009).

Girl-child education and the impact on development

According to Idoko (2009), girl-child education is highly profitable, and any investment into it will produce great results for the accelerated growth and development for any society. With increased focus on reducing poverty across the globe, educating the girl-child is becoming increasingly important. Education is an indispensable tool in creating the atmosphere for women and girls to make positive changes in their lives and the society at large. Education will offer the girl-child the necessary skills to fit into, cope and compete favourably in today's modern, technology-driven and ever-changing world (Human Rights Watch, 2016). According to the World Bank (2016), all nations around the world expend 5% of GDP or 20% of national budget on education because the sector employs at least 5% of the labour force. Girl-child education will boost the development prospects of the society as they will contribute their quota in laying the right foundation for economic prosperity, self-sufficiency, gender equity and societal development.

Accordingly to the United Nations (2015), maternal mortality ratio has dropped by 45% worldwide, since the beginning of the 21st century due to improved education. Girl-child education is a veritable tool for expanding their life chances, and a vaccine against sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea, etc (Mbene, 2011).

Education has a strong correlation with increased agricultural productivity. Educating the girl-child will provide outstanding returns in the aspect of food sufficiency and security. Mbene (2011), estimates that educating women and girls would cause an unprecedented rise in agricultural productivity by 7 and 22 percents.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the modernization theory. The theory was developed from the ideas of Weber and Parsons but became widely used in the Social Sciences through Walter Rostow's works in the 1960s. Modernization theory assumes that for any society to progress into modernity, sophisticated values and behavioural patterns must replace traditionally established norms, values and behaviours (Goorha, 2017). For modernization theorists, modern societies are more complex, productive and guarantee greater welfare for the members.

Third World societies are by this theory assumed to be "undeveloped", while Western societies are regarded as "developed". In order to be fully developed, traditional societies would have to adopt Western values. This requires getting rid of values and behavioural patterns that do not align with Western culture. In relation to the study, traditional values are changing in favour of those from Western societies. Unbiased education for children regardless of sex is a practice that long existed in civilised societies but is progressing speedily in developing societies. All traditional practices inimical to the growth and development of women and girls are making way for a more gender-friendly approach. Based on this theory, the following hypotheses were suggested:

H_0.   There is no significant relationship between the education of parents and their perception towards gender preference for the education of their children.

H_1.   There is a significant relationship between the education of parents and their perception towards gender preference for the education of their children.

Methodology

Study design

The study made use of the cross-sectional and descriptive research designs, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study was conducted in Gwer West local government area of Benue State.

The local government is made up of fifteen (15) council wards, including Avihijime, Gbaange/Tongov, Ikyaghev, Mbabuande, Mbachohon, Mbapa, Mbapupuu/Tswarev, Merkyen, Nyamshi, Saghev/Ukusu, Sengev, Sengev/Yengev, Tijime, Tyoughatee/Injaha and Tsambe/Mbesev. It is dominantly inhabited by the Iharev people of the MINDA geo-political axis who share common cultural, historical and socio-political. The mainstay of the economy of people in the area is agriculture, with the predominant use simple farm tools. Majority of the rice produced in Benue state comes from Gwer West. There are about one hundred and twenty-five (125) primary schools and over thirty (30) post primary schools in the local government area.

Gwer West Local Government has a population of 122,313 people. The Yamane (1976) formula for sample size determination was used to select four hundred (400) respondents.

Sample/Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used in choosing Merkyen, Nyamshi, Saghev/Ukusu, Sengev and Tijime wards for the study. Using the simple random technique, the researcher blindly chose twenty-five squeezed pieces of paper from a basket. They represented 25 villages in 5 wards. Thereafter, the researcher moved from house-to-house to cover the prospective respondents. In each of the selected villages, sixteen (16) respondents were studied. In each council ward, eighty (80) respondents were selected, bringing the total number of respondents for the study to 400.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was done using the semi-structured questionnaire. Analysis was done quantitatively using descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages. In order to facilitate easy processing of the quantitative data, the IBM SPSS Statistics 20 computer package was utilized with the application of Chi-square for test of relationship.

Results and discussions
Socio-demographic Attributes of the Respondents
  The socio-demographic data of the respondents showed that 236(68.6%) of the respondents were male, while 108(31.4%) were female. Results also showed that 134(39.0%) of the respondents were between 31-40 years, 125(36.3%) aged between 18-20 years, while 85(24.7%) respondents were 40 years and above. Data on the marital status of respondents indicated that 187(54.4%) respondents were married, 107(31.1%) were single, while 50(14.6%) respondents were either divorced or widowed. In terms of the educational attainment of respondents, 150(43.6%) acquired secondary school education, 95(27.6%) had tertiary education, 81(23.5%) had no formal education, while 15(5.2%) had acquired only primary school education. The occupation of the respondents revealed that 142(41.3%) were farmers, 115(33.4%) were traders, while 87(25.3%) were artisans, students among others.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Attributes of Respondents

Socio-demographic Attributes	Frequency N = 344	Percentage % = 100
Sex		
Male	236	68.6
Female	108	31.4
Age (Years)		
18-20	125	36.3
31-40	134	39.0
41 and above	85	24.7
Marital Status		
Married	187	54.4
Single	107	31.1
Divorced	26	7.6
Widowed	24	7.0
Educational Attainment		
Non-formal education	81	23.5
Primary	18	5.2
Secondary	150	43.6
Tertiary	95	27.6
Occupation		
Farming	142	41.3
Trading	115	33.4
Others	87	25.3

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Perceptions on the education of female children
  Findings on the perception to the education of female children showed that 147(42.7%) respondents preferred the education of both the male and female child while 125(36.3%) and 72(21%) respondents indicated preference for training only male and only female children respectively.

Table 2: Perceptions on the education of children

Response	Frequency N = 344	Percentage % = 100
Male	125	36.3
Female	72	21

| Both of them | 147 | 42.7 |

Table 2 above shows favourable changes in the perception of individuals towards the education of children regardless of sex. The finding supports Okobia and Ekejiuba (2015), who found that parents from Southern Nigeria have positive attitude towards the education of all children. These changes may not be unconnected with the increased awareness of the impacts that girl-child education could have on women's health and economic stability (Illo *et al.*, 2014) as well as in reducing the rates of maternal/child mortality (Adewusi & Nwokocha, 2018). Cultural practices such of son preference discouraged girl-child education (Yoo *et al.*, 2017), as female children were married out early so that proceeds received as bride wealth could be channelled into marrying for or educating the male child (Okorie, 2017). Changes in such practices account for the present trend in child education, particularly the positive attitude towards girl-child education. Parents are fast realizing that education is a viable tool for raising women who will in future become economically sustainable, self-reliant and who can actively participate in the political affairs of their societies.

Cultural Changes Affecting Girl-child Education

Results on the cultural changes affecting girl-child education showed that 101(29.3%) respondents indicated no emphasis on educating only the male children, 96(27.9%) identified perception of girl-child education as a form of empowerment and 84(24.4%) indicated reduction in the rates of early/child marriages. Also, 37(10.8%) respondents identified change in the perception that women and girls are only good for child bearing, while 26(7.6%) identified changes in other aspects of culture.

Table 3: Cultural Changes Affecting the Education of the Girl-child

Aspects of change	Frequency N = 344	Percentage % = 100
No emphasis in the education of male children only	101	29.3
Perception of girl-child education as a form of empowerment	96	27.9
Reduction in the rates of early/child marriage	84	24.4
Change in perception of women as only child bearers	37	10.8
Others	26	7.6

Information on Table 3 above shows that some aspects of culture have changed in the education of male and female children. Noticeable among these are de-emphasis on male children education, perception of girl-child education as a form of empowerment and reduction in the rates of early/child marriages. The finding corroborates Igbolo and Ejue (2016) who observed that programs have been developed to address the cultural constraints and support the education of girls. Parents are becoming increasingly aware of their duties towards the growth and development of their children, and the importance of girl-child education to social development (Chingtham & Guite, 2017).Mohamed *et al* (2017) also found that the increased number of women in all professions including teaching is positively influencing the attitude of rural parents towards the school enrolment of female children as they find the presence of female teachers more reassuring and comfortable. Even patriarchy, a distinct cultural feature in developing societies, is making way for a more gender-friendly approach to issues, thus affording girls enormous and equal opportunities to also access education (Huisman *et al.*, 2010). It therefore, suffices to state that the growing understanding that potentials of the boy-child do not surpass that of the girls, hence the

girl-child should not be discriminated against accessing education is reshaping the disposition of parents towards education female children.

Effects of Girl-child Education on Development

Results on Table 4 below that 208(60.5%) respondents said girl-child will education will improve socio-economic development, 53(15.4%) said it will reduce in gender disparity, 62(18.0%) indicated improved educational standard, while 21(61%) respondents said it will enhance political participation.

Table 4: Effects of Girl-child Education on Development

Effects	Frequency N = 344	Percentage % = 100
Reduce gender disparity	53	15.4
Improve socio-economic development	208	60.5
Increase political participation	21	6.1
Improve educational standard	62	18.0

From the results in Table 4 above, it is evident that imply girl-child education has become a top priority for most nations, families and individuals. Essentially, educated girls will contribute immensely to the society's social and economic stability by utilizing the knowledge acquired through formal education in profitable ventures capable of lifting them, their families as well as the larger society out of poverty. Similarly, girl-child education has enormous implications on beating down the level of disparity and inequality that exists in the society on the basis of gender in terms of access to employment and other opportunities. Politically, educating girls will empower them intellectually and otherwise to compete favourably with/against the men and/or complement their efforts in providing good governance for the people. It will afford women and girls the opportunity to desist from apathetic attitudes to political activities and make them key players in the political landscape of their societies. Girl-child education will also engineer the overall growth and development of the educational sector. Educated girls can better solve daily problems facing them, improve their wellbeing and ensure a comfortable life. Relatedly, Bajaj and Chiv (2009) posited that, education is a vital instrument for positive transformation of systems of knowledge, values and patterns of behaviour required for a sustainable and stable society.

Table 5: Cross tabulation of the educational status of parents and gender preference for child education

Gender Preference in education	Educational Status				Total
	No Formal	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
Male	67	30	20	8	125
Female	21	22	20	9	72
Both	16	34	40	57	147
Total	104	86	80	74	**344**

Table 6: Computation of X^2 values for hypothesis one

Cell	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\frac{\sum(O-E)^2}{E}$
A	67	37.8	29.2	58.4	1.5
B	30	31.3	-1.3	2.6	0.1
C	20	29	-29	58	2
D	8	26.9	-18.9	37.8	1.4
E	21	21.8	-0.8	1.6	0

F	22	18	4	8	0.4
G	20	16.7	3.3	6.6	0.4
H	8	15.5	-7.5	3.4	2.2
I	16	44.4	-28.4	56.8	1.3
J	34	36.8	2.8	5.6	0.2
K	40	34.2	5.8	11.6	0.3
L	57	31.6	25.4	50.8	1.6

$$\sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} = 11.4$$

Table 7: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.812	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	33.061	6	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.882	1	.348
N of Valid Cases	301		

DF =   (C-1) (R-1)

=   (4-1) (3-1)

=   (3) (2)

=   6

Using Crammers V to calculate the extent of relationship,

$$V = \frac{\sqrt{X^2}}{N \text{ (min of r-1 or (C-1)}}$$

$$V = \frac{3.4}{12\,(4\text{-}1)}$$

$$V = \frac{3.4}{12\,(3)}$$

$$V = \frac{3.4}{36}$$

$$V = 0.1$$

This signifies a very weak relationship.

Decision Rule:
Accept H1 if the critical value is greater than X^2 calculated. From the table above, the value of calculated X^2 is 11.4   while the critical value of X^2 = 16.812, we therefore reject the null hypothesis which says, there is no significant relationship between the education of parents and their perception towards gender preference for the education of their children and accept the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between the education of parents and their perception towards gender preference for the education of their children.
Conclusion and recommendations
        Presently, there is an unprejudiced attitude towards children's education. This owes fundamentally to the changes in patterns of some cultural behaviour such as emphasis on the education of the male child alone, the practice of early/child marriage and perception of girl-child education as unrewarding, which hitherto hampered the female children from accessing formal education. There is growing awareness of the fact that education is the right for all, and educating a

female child is fundamental to social, political, economic and educational development of any society. The study therefore recommends:

1.   Sustenance of the current cultural attitude towards girl-child education. Increased girl-child education will offer society greater prospects for speedy development.
2.   Eradication of negative perceptions to the education of female children that still hold sway in some parts of the study area. The government, corporate organizations and NGOs can achieve this by way of sensitization/campaigns using posters and the radio which are effective channels of communication to people living in the rural areas.
3.   Relevant government/non-governmental agencies and good spirited individuals should encourage children in diverse cultural backgrounds to enrol in schools by promoting and funding schools and important educational programmes and projects.

Conflict of interest: The author affirms that there is no conflict of interest.

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