

GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION AND PERCEIVED ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined girl-child education and perceived administrative competence of female principals. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions guided the study. The population consisted of all the female teachers and students of all the 14 public secondary schools in Osisioma Local Government Area. A sample of 10 female teachers and 10 female students (280 respondents) were randomly selected from each of the public secondary schools. The instrument for data collection was a 16-item questionnaire titled "Girl-Child Education and Perceived Administrative Competence of Female Principals (GEPACFP)" was used to elicit responses from the respondents. It was face and content validated by experts in the department of educational management and measurement and evaluation. Test re-test method was used to test the reliability which yielded 0.78. Mean was used to answer the research questions. A mean of 2.50 was used as the criterion mean for decision. The findings of the study revealed that women agreed that the principals perform the following functions: supervision of instructional activities; motivation of both the staff and students,

management of school finances and provision and maintenance of physical facilities among others. Women also agreed that female principals can perform their administrative functions competently just like or if not better than their male counterparts. It was recommended that girl-child education should be encouraged to enable women occupy better positions and perform competently in their chosen professions among others.

Keywords: Girl-Child, Education, Administration, Competence, Principals.

Education all over the world is recognized as an instrument for national development. It is the fulcrum around which the quick development of economic, political, sociological and human resources of any country revolves. The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2013) recognized education as "an instrument per-excellence for effective national development" as well as " a dynamic instrument of change". Education is the greatest investment any nation can make for rapid economic, political sociological and human resources development .It could mean the training of the entire person to enable him not only to read, write and be proficient in a given job, but also to fit well into a society in which she lives. According to Uzoma (2013), education helps men and women claim their rights and realize their potentials in economic, political and social arenas. It is also the single most powerful way to lift people out of poverty. It should be noted that mere education per se may not lead to development. What is of importance is the quality and type of education planned for the society.

Girl-child refers to a female child from ages 6-18 years. The National Child Welfare Policy cited in Ada (2001) defines the girl-child as a female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years of age. Offorma (2009) defines girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen (18) years. This covers the periods of infancy, childhood, early and late adolescence stages of development. The girl-child also refers to a young female who matures into a woman and marry.

Girl-child education is the education of female children. Education has special benefits for girls, both when they are young and later as adult women. According to Aggrey cited in Amoscp (2012), if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Education of women makes them become good administrators.

Administration in education implies the arrangement of human and material resources available in education and using them systematically for the achievement of educational objectives (Nkwoh, 2011). School administration according to Ojo cited in Ekundayo (2010) involves planning, organising, directing, supervising and

evaluating the school system all of which are directed towards efficient and effective teaching and learning in the school in order to produce quality outputs.

Webster's Third New International Dictionary cited in Oboegbulem (2013) defines competence as "the quality or state of being functionally adequate or having sufficient knowledge, judgement, skill or strength". Therefore, administrative competence means the quality or state of being functionally adequate in matters concerning administration or having sufficient judgment and skill in administration.

The principal is the chief executive of a secondary school. Female principals like their male counterparts are responsible for the overall administration and management of their schools. They are expected to perform at par or even better than their male counterparts in discharging their responsibilities. The success or failure of the school hinges on the roles and competences of the principals. This is because the principals occupy such a key position that what they do or fail to do, make or mar the progress of this school. As the chief executive of schools, the principals have multifarious tasks to perform for successful administration of the school system. Many authors have discussed the administrative roles of principals. Supporting the above assertion, Azikiwe in Oboegbulem (2013) opines that women have broken loose from the manacles of invention. As women are now seen as good administrators, planners, accountants, lawyers, and members of other prestigious professions. Furthermore, Marshall cited in Akpan and Eno (2008) state that women naturally are recognized for their doggedness and effectiveness in accomplishing tasks. Women have also been tested and found effective in the execution of cooperative ventures. Similarly, Swaleha (2013) asserts that the principals being instructional leaders are at the vantage positions to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate and disseminate current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery. In addition, Ezeocha cited in Nkwoh (2011) views the roles of principals as: Supervision of instruction; Curriculum development; aid evaluation; School community relations; Staff personnel administration; student personnel administration; Management of school finances and Management of school physical facilities. Principals continue to be responsible for the management of their schools even though their primary responsibility has shifted. In the same vein, Ojo in Ekundayo (2010) observes that for the principals to ensure efficient service delivery towards producing quality outputs in this 21st century, they must perform the following functions: management of school finance; provision and maintenance of physical facilities; motivation of staff and students; supervision of curriculum and instruction and as facilitators.

In South-Eastern Nigeria especially Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State, some parents are reluctant to invest on the education of their female

children with the mindset that such daughters will marry and carryover the investment to their husbands. This created a lot of disparity in educational attainment between the boys and the girls. Similarly, Agbakwu (2002) observes that there is a serious problem in terms of completion rates of female students. This problem of male/female disparity in access to education in Nigeria is not restricted to the primary schools; rather it is almost the same for both secondary and tertiary institutions. UNICEF (2001) report revealed that out of a total number of about 5,000,000 students that were admitted in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, female enrolment represented only 34 percent. This situation becomes worrisome to everybody.

In Sweden, both sexes enjoy equal access to schooling and by implication, socio-political participation and the Millennium Development Goals target of education for all have been realized considerably. In Africa, Mozambique and South Africa have met the Common Wealth's 30 percent benchmark for women's representation in governance.

In response to this disparity, there have been attempts to close the gap in educational attainment between the boys and the girls. Many countries have come to the realization that no meaningful development will be achieved if the male and female members of the society are not carried along. The world conference on Education For All (EFA) held in Geneva in 1990 stressed the need for gender equity in education. The Beijing Conference of 1995 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of 2005 also emphasized gender equity. In Nigeria, the National Policy on Education (2013) also acknowledged the need to equalize educational opportunities between boys and girls. The various reforms embarked upon by the Federal Government include Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976, the 6-3-3-4 system of education in 1981, the computer education in 1988, the Nigerian Information Technology Policy and the Universal Basic Education in 1999, the adoption and ratification of International Conventions and Instruments which emphasized the elimination of gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women by member nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Conventions on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women among others. (Ciroma, 2006). The Strategy for Girls Education (SAGEN) was launched in Nigeria by UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Education in July, 2003. It resulted to Girls' Education Project (GEP) launched in December, 2004—a joint initiative between the Federal Government of Nigeria, DFID and UNICEF. The goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and to all levels of education no later than 2015. UNICEF has also been involved in the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI) which is a multi-country project sponsored by Norwegian Government to promote the schooling of girls in Africa (UNICEF, 2007). Furthermore, many state governments introduced various

measures geared towards increasing the educational attainment of women in Nigeria. Umezulike and Omaze (2007) opine that a former First Lady, Dr. Mrs. Maryam Babangida floated the idea of better life for rural women. To actualize this, she established women education centres nationwide. Similarly, wives of state governors have set up skills acquisition centres for women to enable them contribute their quota to national development and improved standard of living.

The result has been the increase in the number of schools and pupils and students, girls' enrolment in primary, secondary and higher institutions. To the extent that women now have better job opportunities and many are taking leadership positions such as principals. This situation in Nigeria is typical of the situation in Osisioma Local Government of Abia State. Many girls in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State are now educated and they occupy leadership positions as principals. They are expected to perform the administrative functions of principals as their male counterpart. This is the reason this study investigated girl-child education and perceived administrative competence of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State. The theoretical framework of this study was anchored on the Women in Development (WID) theory which states that education leads to economic development. It advocates for inclusion of women in economic and educational policies as a means of achieving women empowerment. It also states that there is a relationship between education and employment in the formal sector. This is because education helps women to acquire skills that will help them secure good employment thereby empowering them to face global challenges. Education of women will enable female principals to become more competent in school administration.

Statement of the Problem

Education is an important instrument for national development. No nation can develop well if her citizens especially the women are not educated. Equalizing educational attainment will help boost rapid development in any nation. There has been increase in access to girl-child education in Nigeria. Girls' access to education especially in Osisioma Local Government of Abia State has improved tremendously. This has made women to occupy higher positions in work organizations such as principals. However, People have continued to doubt their ability to accomplish all the tasks of principalship as their male counterpart. In view of the above assertion, there is the need to ascertain the perception of women on the administrative competence of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State. The questions are: 1. What is the perception of women on the administrative functions of principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State? 2. What is the perception of women on the administrative competences of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State? These are the concern of this research work.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the perception of women on the administrative functions of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?
2. What is the perception of women on the administrative competence of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of all the female teachers and female students in the fourteen secondary schools in Osisioma Local Government Area. A sample of 140 female teachers, 10 from each school and 140 female students, 10 from each school were randomly selected from each of the fourteen secondary schools. This yielded a total of 280. The instrument for data collection was a self structure questionnaire titled “Girl-Child Education and Perceived Administrative Competence of Female Principals” (GEPACFP). The questionnaire has two sections. The first section sought information on the respondents’ personal data while the second section contained 16 items that addressed Nigerian women perception towards the benefits of girl-child education and the problems militating against girl-child education. It was structured on a 4 point likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). A letter of introduction was attached to each of the questionnaire. Instructions on how to complete the questionnaire were given. The researcher with one assistant administered the questionnaire to all the respondents and collected them on the spot to ensure maximum returns. Out of the 280 questionnaires administered, 12 were not returned while 6 were rejected due to inconsistencies. This brought the sample to 262 (136 teachers and 126 students). Mean scores was used to answer the research questions. Items with mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed or accepted while those below 2.50 were regarded as disagreed or rejected.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the perception women on the administrative functions of principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?

Table1: Mean and rank order on perception of female teachers and female students on the administrative functions of principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Perception of women on the functions of principals.</i>	<i>Female Teachers (n=136)</i>	<i>Female Students (n=126)</i>
		\bar{X} Rank order	\bar{X} Rank
1	Maintain cordial relationship with the communities	3.30 2nd	3.24 4th
2	Appointment of new teachers	2.30 7th	2.17 7th
3	Motivate both the staff and students	3.22 5th	3.26 2nd
4	Management of school finance	3.26 3rd	3.29 1st
5	Provision and maintenance of physical facilities	3.25 4th	3.13 6th
6	Supervision of instructional activities in the school	3.32 1st	3.25 3rd
7	Retirement of teachers	2.21 8th	2.16 8th
8	Provide leadership for curriculum development	3.15 6th	3.23 5th
Aggregate Mean		3.00	2.97

Table 1 shows that female teachers and female students agreed on items 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean scores of 3.00 for female teachers and 2.97 for female students show that the respondents accepted the items on the table as the functions of principals. Therefore, girl-child education should be given greater priority by all stakeholders. This will prepare them to occupy positions as principals.

Research Questions 2

What is the perception of women on the administrative competence of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?

Table 4.2: Mean and rank order on the perception of female teachers and female students on the administrative competence of female principals in Osisioma Local Government Area of Abia State?

S/N	<i>Perception of women on the administrative competence of female principals</i>	<i>Female Teachers (n=136)</i>		<i>Female Students (n=126)</i>	
		\bar{X}	Rank	\bar{X}	Rank
9	Female principals supervise instructional activities in the school.	3.48	3rd	3.33	2nd
10	Female principals can appoint new teachers into the school system.	2.27	7th	2.14	8 th
11	Female principals have the ability to motivate both the teachers and students.	3.49	2nd	3.37	1 st
12	Female principals can retire teachers.	2.76	6th	3.32	3rd
13	Female principals manage school finance competently.	3.02	5th	3.17	5th
14	Female principals maintain cordial relationship with the communities	3.25	4th	3.13	6th
15	Female principals can provide and maintain physical facilities.	3.53	1st	3.26	4th
16	Female principals have the ability to appoint new teachers.	2.20	8th	2.37	7th
	Aggregate mean	3		3.01	

Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed on items 9, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 with mean scores greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. The aggregate mean of 3 for female teachers and 3.01 for female students show that the respondents agreed that

the female principals just like their male counterparts possess the administrative competencies required to manage secondary schools. Girl-Child education should be encouraged as education equips women with the skills and capabilities to play leadership roles competently.

Discussion of Results

The findings of this study revealed that women agreed that education enables women to occupy leadership positions as principals. They agreed to the functions performed by principals in secondary schools. Such functions include supervision of instructional activities in schools, motivation of both the staff and students, management of school finances, provision and maintenance of physical facilities among others. This is in line with Swaleha (2013), Ojo in Ekundayo (2010) and Ezeocha in Nkwah (2011) assertion on the functions of the principals.

The implication is that if only the boys are allowed to go to school, there will be educational imbalance or inequality in the society globally. We will have only male leaders such as principals in the secondary schools and other professions. This is the reason the Federal Government of Nigeria is trying to equalize access to education for both the boys and the girls.

The results of this study also showed that women agreed that female principals can perform their administrative functions competently just like or if not better than their male counterparts. This concurs with Azikiwe in Oboegbulem (2013) that women have broken loose from the manacles of invention. As women are now seen as good administrators, planners, accountants, lawyers, and members of other prestigious professions. Furthermore, this is in agreement with Marshall cited in Akpan and Eno (2008) who stated that women naturally are recognized for their doggedness and effectiveness in accomplishing tasks. And that women have been tested and found effective in the execution of cooperative ventures. Based on this, girl-child education should highly promoted by all governments in order to balance educational attainment in the world in general and Nigeria in particular.

Conclusion

Girl-child education is very important for national development. Denying women access to education will create a vacuum that will be difficult to fill. Education prepares women for employment and equips them with administrative competences to excel in their different professions. The principals perform the following functions: supervision of instructional activities in the school; motivation of both staff and students; management of school finances; provision and maintenance of physical facilities; maintenance of cordial relationship with the communities among others. Female principals have the administrative competences to perform these functions like their male counterparts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for the study. Their implementation will help to improve the position of women in the society.

1. Women should be encouraged to go to school.
2. Women should be encouraged to learn trades or skills to enable them become resourceful both in their homes and the nation.
3. There should be a fair distribution of qualified male and female teachers to the position of principals by the Abia State Government.
4. Young girls should be educated on the dangers of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

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