



EFFECT OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON LOW ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION AMONG GIRLS IN BALI LGA, TARABA STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The best asset for developing any society lies on investment in human capital, especially through education. Free basic education has been viewed as a panacea to the development of human capital, especially in the third world countries. One of these countries, such as Nigeria in West Africa, has compulsory policy on free basic education. However, despite heavy investment in the sector, access to basic education for the girl child remains a challenge. The study sought to establish cultural factors affecting low access of the girl-child to free primary education in Nigeria with a focus on Bali Local Government Area (LGA). The study employed a cross sectional survey research design. An interview schedule and questionnaire were used to collect data. Data collected was analyzed using content analysis and with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme respectively. Both qualitative and quantitative data was presented using descriptive statistics. The study has established that cultural factors have an effect on the girl child's access to basic education in Bali LGA. From study findings, it is shown that over four fifths (81%) of the households had six and above members of household. The size of a household was found to have implications on access to education for girls in the study area with regard to resource allocation and utilization. It was glaring during the study that preference on access to education was predominantly (80%) given to boys, parents preferred to educate boys compared to girls (20%). This mirrors the situation in Nigeria, owing to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society. The researcher recommends that the Ministry of Education to work with UNICEF and USAID to organize schooling feeding programme in the area with respect to large family sizes. Relevant ministries in collaboration with Ministry of Education should create more awareness on family planning strategy. It was recommended that the girlchild be given equal access to educational opportunity, to contribute meaningfully in her community and the nation at large.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a critical aspect of human resource development and one of the most promising pathways for individuals to realize better and more productive lives (Glennerster *et al.*, 2011). It is also one of the primary drivers of economic development of every nation in the world (ibid).

This is reiterated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that education is not only an end in itself but also a means to achieving the broad global development agenda, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2014). Further, this reality is recognized by the international community singling out education as a basic human right and a catalyst for development (ibid). In this regard, education has been given a central focus in most international treaties, conventions and agreements. These are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), established universal access to primary education with special

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emphasis on girls as a goal for development 1990s. Article 28 of the convention on the right of the child (1989) states that education is a right which must be achieved on the basis of equal opportunity. (UN, General assembly 1989). The convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (UN, General assembly, 1979). The world conference on Education for All, held from 5th to 9th March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, was not a single event but the start of a powerful movement on education. The Jomtien conference stressed as the most urgent priority to ensure universal access to primary education and to improve the quality of education of girls. (Kyari and Ayodele, 2014). The United Nations world summit for children (New York 1990) underlines the education of the girl child as a nucleus for enhancing women's status and their roles in development. (UNICEF, 2007). The world conference on education held in Dakar Senegal from 26th to 28th April 2001 was to review the assessments of the progress made during Jomtien decade and to renew commitment to achieve the goals and target of education for All especially for the girl child. (UNESCO, 2003). Education commitment was also clear in the expired Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were established in the year 2000. In the MDGs, the world's governments committed to achieving universal access to free, quality and compulsory primary education by 2015, especially for the girl child (UN, 2000).

Despite progress in eliminating educational and social disparity between men and women during the last century, gender equality remains an elusive goal particularly in the developing world. (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007). In many countries of the world, women and girls have less access to education, an important predictor of well-being. (ibid). Globally, despite a net increase in enrollments, a gender gap persists in education attainment. In many countries, educating girls is widely perceived as of less value than educating boys (UN, 2010). While the role of education may generally be applauded, it is also true that women and girls, the world over, have generally been disadvantaged in their bid to access educational opportunities. (ibid). Two thirds of the illiterate populations in the world are women and girls; over 63 million girls around the world are out of school, and 47% of the out of school girls are never expected to enroll as compared to 35% of boys. UNESCO, 2016 in Somani, (2017). UNESCO, 2003 in Akinbi and Akinbi, (2015) records that literacy rate for Nigerian girls and women stood at 47%, while male were 53%, yet female form the larger population. Educating girls is pivotal to development, a famous African proverb apprises us, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family (nation)" Suen, 2013 in Somani 2017. Similar observations are made by Simbine *et al.*, (2015) that girls all over the world, have suffered from sex engendered denial and discrimination in most aspects of national development. Arguably, one of the most serious kinds of this denials and discrimination has been that of access to education as a basic human right. Indeed, there exist wide disparities in girl-child access to educational opportunities in the world today (UNESCO, 2014). Over 130 million children in the world are not in school and two thirds of these children are girls, with close to 45 million more girls than boys not receiving primary education (Johannes, 2010). Accordingly, girls and women, continue to occupy lower social and economic status in society as compared to their male counterparts. In fact, social and cultural traditions, attitudes and beliefs have continued to exert pressure on women and the

girl-child. (Davis, *et al.*, 2013). This has resulted into the denial of girl's rights, stifling their abilities to play an equal role with their male counterparts, especially in developing their homes and communities (ibid). However, the right of the girl-child to have equal access to educational opportunities is not a new subject in educational discourse.

In Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, access to education is identified as a basic human right. While emphasizing on the same declaration in 1990, the world conference on Education for All (EFA) declared that improving access to education for girls and women as '*the most urgent priority*' (Kyari and Ayodele, 2014). Evidently, more than one hundred countries re-affirmed this position at the April 2000 Dakar World Education Forum by urging all states in the world to ensure that by 2015 all children, with special emphasis on girls, to have had access to and completed primary education of good quality (ibid). The problem with such global declarations, however, is that they often leave the discretion of implementation to state parties who do not always translate them into tangible actions. Indeed, in many international forums there has been reconsideration and reflections on commitments and obligations to the young and the marginalized in embracing education. Evidently, there exists significant discrimination in girl-child education in some countries where in Afghanistan, for instance, girls are simply barred from school under the Taliban regime (Alabi *et al.*, 2014). In Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram means "western education is forbidden". The insurgency had brought a fatal blow on the enrolment of pupils and students especially girls in Northeast Nigeria, parents and pupils/students live in perpetual fear of attacks which has grievous consequences on girl's education or school attendance (Medugu, 2017). The group has carried out mass abduction including the kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok in April 2014, children especially girls and educators in Northeast Nigeria are out of school. (ibid). The constant threat posed by Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, which started 2009 and other extremists' religious sect like the Jama'atu Anbarul Muslimima, FinBadilas Sudan, undermines efforts at improving education in Northeast Nigeria. Ruquyatu, (2013). Such obstacles to access to education can result in severe developmental problems. Children especially girls run the risk of never being able to return to school or completing their education, thus diminishing the potential contribution they can make to society Brenda, (2010) in Medugu, (2017).

Drawing from history, it is evident that there has been a persistent universal devaluation of women and the girl-child in Africa. Akinbi and Akinbi, (2015). The role of the female has been traditionally linked mainly to reproductive activities, together with matters related to beauty and home making. Indeed Akinbi and Akinbi, 2015 confirmed this notion when they allude that the obstacles women and girls face in their bid to access education in Africa has always been assumed that way and this has persisted. The result of this has been to render women and girls as weak actors in national development. However, the centrality of women's contribution to national development cannot be underestimated. Evidence in several studies has shown that an investment in girls' education is an investment in the family, community and nation as it improves the overall quality of life of the population (Adetunde and Akenisan, 2008, Offorma, 2009, and Makama 2013. Ogunipe (2007) in Akinbi and Akinbi 2015, reported that with adequate education, a girl child has a chance to be enlightened on health

and national issues, better ways of bringing up her own children and on informed decision making about her future. In fact, education of women and girls is particularly associated with many benefits such as a significant reduction in infant and child and maternal mortality and morbidity, improvement in family health and nutrition, lowering of fertility rates, improved chances of children's education, and increased opportunities for income earning in both wage and non-wages sectors (Nkoshia, *et al.*, 2013). Some of the ways in which girls generally find themselves excluded in accessing education in Africa are evident in family allocation of resources for education. More specifically, if a family has to make a choice about who should get first priority between a girl and a boy to be allocated limited finances to go to school, obviously the boy carries the day (UNICEF 2007). In this regard, girl child education has become an issue of concern in most developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where there are large numbers of young girls who do not go to school. For example, the number of out-of-school girls had risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002 in sub-Saharan Africa (Offorma, 2009). Accordingly, Good-luck (2011) in Tyoakaa *et al.* (2014), says Nigeria has 9 million out-of-school children, and this has been referred to as the highest in the whole of Africa. Girls and women constitute 50% of Nigeria's population; ironically, less than 39% of the female populations are literate against 63% literate male population (Nwakego, 2014). Causes of these large disparities of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa are many. Agana and Miller, (2015) observed that socio-cultural practices such as early marriages (elopement, the use of charms), traditional gender roles and teenage pregnancies were some of the barriers accounting for the poor access, retention and participation of girls in basic schools, making girl-child education elusive. In spite of progress in enrolment, one of the shortcomings related to access to education is gender disparity. Nigeria has the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) in sub-Saharan Africa and has a wide national disparity in the ratio of male and female enrolment in schools (UNDP, 2015). Statistics indicate that the national primary school enrolment ratio for the boys and girls is 3:2 (Ibid). Taraba state, like any other states in Northeast Nigeria, grapples with low girl-child enrolment in primary schools. In this state, the numbers stand at 42.06% of the national enrollment figures (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics 2013/2014). Such a high percentage has become a major concern and is a worrying trend to the Taraba state government, and stakeholders in the education sector. This low access of girls to free primary education has, over the years, continued to widen the gap in educational and economic inequalities between the girl and the boy child (Tyoakaa *et al.* 2014). The study was conducted in Bali, which is one of the Local Government Areas (LGA) within Taraba state, Nigeria. The site of the study was chosen because it has the lowest girl-child access to free primary education enrolment rates (Taraba State Annual School Census Report 2014/2015). The figures of Bali LGA in Taraba state stood at 42% enrollment rate for girls' meaning that 58% of the girls have no access (Taraba State Annual School Census Report 2014/2015).

The Context of the Paper

The best approach for developing any society is to invest in human capital, especially through education (Richardson, 2009). In this regard, the acquired knowledge, attitudes, values and skills are most likely to guarantee a high degree of economic and social freedom of individuals. In fact, the most

natural consequence of this is to enhance individual and collective contributions to community and national development (Efe, 2001). Nevertheless, access to education by the girls to free primary education in Nigeria remains problematic. According to Good-luck (2011), in Tyoakaa *et al.*, (2014), Nigeria has 9 million (37%) out-of-school children, which is more than one-third of its primary school age children and this is the highest in Africa. More precisely, 7.3 million children have limited access to primary education in Nigeria; 62% of which are girls (UNICEF 2011). The Taraba State Annual School Census Report (2014/2015) indicates that only 42% of girls had access to primary education, leaving 58% with no access to free basic education, within the period of 2014 and 2015. These figures were against the policy stipulation that free primary must be accessible to all and should not favor any particular gender. Evidently, literature reviewed and observations drawn from educational practice show non-compliance to the policy. This reveals a gap between policy and practice of free primary education in Nigeria, which should be corrected. Given the fact that access can be affected by cultural variables involving costs of family size, child preference in accessing education, it is obvious that there is more that affect girls' access to education than school fees and levies in the country. The critical questions which this study answered included what cultural factors contribute to low access of the girl child to basic education and why were the principles of gender equality on access to free primary education not being realized in Bali LGA?

Purpose and objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of cultural factors on the low access to basic education among girls in Bali LGA, Taraba State Nigeria. The study was guided by one objective: To identify the effect of cultural factors on access to primary education for the girl-child in Bali LGA in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Methodology, Sample Size and Sampling Approaches

The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design in the collection of data. A Survey design entails data collection on more than one case and at a single point in time in order to collect both quantitative and qualitative information in connection with two or more variables which are often examined to detect patterns of association (Alan, 2012). Survey design was selected for the study because it allowed not only the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time but also it is commonly used and appropriate design for sociological and educational research. According to Brannen (2005) it also enables the collection of large quantities of data from the study population in the most economical way. The study samples were drawn from clusters forming sampling frames comprised of parents of girls out of school and head teachers. The sampling procedure for the proposed study involved first, sample size determination; second, respondents identification and third, selection of respondents for the study as presented. More precisely, sample selection began with inclusion criteria for participation in the study. First, the household units with girls out of school were mapped out and then selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Second, purposive sampling was used to select the schools, with the lowest enrolment rate of the girl-child, where the head teachers or their deputies were automatically included in the study in

Bali LGA. The sample size determination for this study was based on first, the formula by Bailey (1982), where thirty (30) elements were considered as the minimum size of a sample. Accordingly, thirty (30) head teachers were sampled from the 93 schools. Second, the formula by (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) was used to determine the sample size for the parents with girls out of school as illustrated next:

$$n = \frac{NZ^2p(1-p)}{e^2N + Z^2p(1-p)}$$

Where:

- n - The sample size
- N - Is the population size = 31,343
- Z - The critical value = 1.96
- p - The expected response proportion = 0.5
- e - Margin of error = 5%

$$n = \frac{31343 \cdot 1.96^2 \cdot 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2 \cdot 31343 + 1.96^2 \cdot 0.5(1-0.5)}$$

$n=379$, Parents`

The computation of the sample size based on the clusters of the study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Target population sampling frames and sample size

Category of respondents	Target population (N)	Total sample size (n)
Parents	31,343	379
Primary school head / deputy head teachers	93	30
Total	31,436	409

Source: Taraba State Universal Education Board (2013) / National Population Commission Taraba State (2006).

Commission Taraba State (2006)

The study utilized a combination of questionnaires and interview schedules to collect data from the respondents, this is because of the differential literacy levels. The rationale behind a combined tool approach was to allow participation of both literate and non-literate respondents in the study. The idea was to deepen the understanding of the problem under study and capture the salient information relevant in achieving the objectives of the study. The questionnaires and interview schedules were constructed guided by the variables and specific objective of the study.

Effect of Cultural Factors on Access to Education for Girls

Culture is often understood as a complex system that determines the manner in which knowledge, beliefs and any other behavioral patterns are acquired by the members of society usually manifested in material or non-material things (Spencer, 2012). Bali LGA is a rural set up that most likely subscribes to traditional and cultural ways of life. Cultural factors influence how a particular group of people or class behaves. The culture of a community may influence social rights such as those of access to education for girls, which may affect people's quality of life. The study hoped to unearth cultural practices that affect low access of the girl-child to primary education. Offorma (2009) asserted that most of the factors that militate against girl-child access to education are socio-cultural. It was therefore within the purview of this study

to identify cultural factors with an effect on low access to basic education for girls. The following cultural factors were considered significant for the study in explaining low access to primary education for girls in Bali LGA.

Effects of Size of the Family on Girl Child Access to Primary Education

Family size in this study is conceived to mean the number of people who share the same roof and live together within the same household. More precisely, the study focused on siblings of same parents. This variable was included in this study because it would give an understanding of the preferred size of the households under study, which has implications for access to education for the children. More importantly, the size of a household could be used to indicate the living standard of a family, and how it influences access of the girl child to primary education in the study area. According to the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2013, the average family size in Nigeria is 5.5 persons. Looking at the economic condition of households, it is possible for one to tell the ease with which households can access resources and whether the resources available at their disposal can sustain the needs of the households'. Figure 1 contains the results of the study.

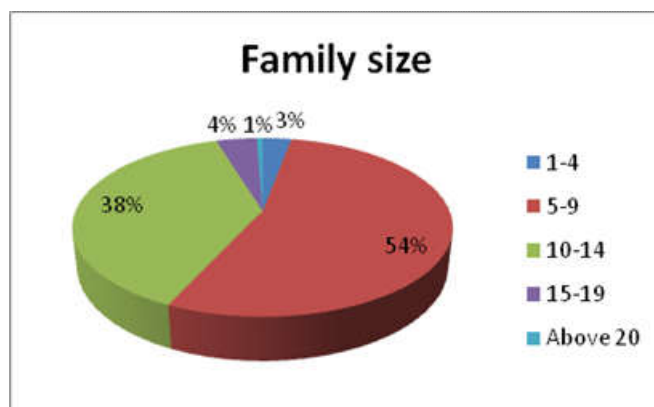


Figure 1. Family size

Figure 1 shows that over four fifths (81%) of the respondents had six and above children, while almost one fifth (19%) had five and below. The finding on larger (6) family size may have serious implications for access to education, especially with regard to resource allocation. The struggle to apportion the resource to the various competing needs of the household can further impact on access to education, especially for the girl child due to the patriarchy nature of the community. In fact, this finding of the study corroborates that of Mogstad and Wiswall (2010), who observed the effect of additional siblings, and found that education is lowered for children when they belong to larger families. The study (ibid) posits that the larger the family, the less likely the females will attend school.

Effects of the Number of Girls and Boys in a Household on Access to Primary Education for Girls

The number of girls and boys was considered in this study to further dig into the variable family size, so as to find out the actual average total number of boys and girls in a household, and how this number, has effects on the girl child access to primary education. Figure 2, has the summary of the findings of the study. Figure 2, reveals that there are more (41.6%) respondents who indicated that households had three boys,

compared to those who said three (34.3%) girls. Those who reported four girls were more (32.6%, than those who said four boys (12.4%). Again respondents saying there were five girls (18.2%) were more than those who indicated five boys (10.9%), while those who said two boys were 23.7% compared to two girls (5.0%). From the findings, it is obvious that those parents, who reported four and five girls in their households, tend to be predominant as compared to boys. This depicts that girls are more, yet it is expected that access to primary education would be equal of with slight difference. However, field observations show that preference for accessing formal education in Bali State is given to the boy child at the detriment of girl child. This finding supports the work of Simbine *et al.*, (2015) who observed that girls, the world over, have suffered from sex engendered denial and discrimination in most aspects of national development. One of the most serious kinds of this denials and discrimination has been that of access to education as a basic human right (Ibid).

those of Agbo, (2017), who found that many families prefer boys to be educated than girls in Nigeria. This is attributed by Agbo to the fact that some families are too large due to polygamous marriage and extended affiliations, where in such families it becomes difficult for parents to cater adequately for numerous children.

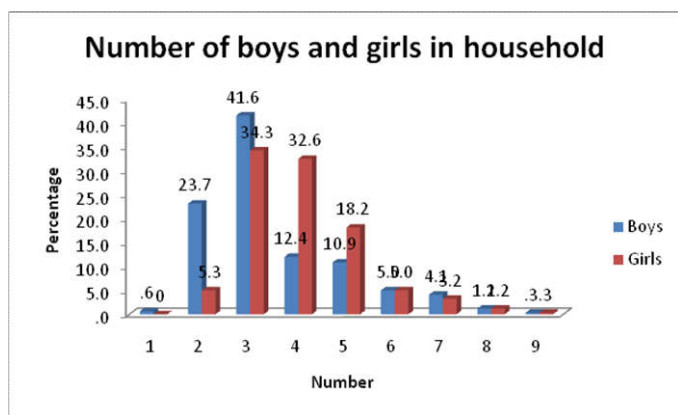


Figure 2. Number of boys and girls in Household

Effect of School Attendance by Children on Access for Girls

This variable was conceived to mean the average number of children who have started attending school in a household. This variable was considered important because it would probably provide useful insights that would broaden our understanding by revealing the number of children who have started attending school. The variable was analyzed within gender consideration to show the trend of school attendance between boys and girls in the study area. Data from the households visited showed, on one hand, that there were 902 boys who had attained school going age. Of these boys (902), it was found that over four fifths (84%) were attending school, while only more than one tenth (16%) were not attending schooling as shown in Figure 3. The study also found out the status of school attendance for girls in Bali LGA. While in Figure 3 the study calculates proportions from 902 boys in the studied households, Figure 4 shows percentages calculated from 1025 girls as reported in the studied households had attained school going age. Of the total (1025) girls, it was found out that over three fifths (68%) were attending school, while over one quarter (32%) were not attending school. From the findings in Figure 3 and 4, it is clear that majority of boys (84%) and girls (68%) were mentioned to have started schooling. The differential access between boys (84%) and girls (68%) is a clear reflection of Nigerian society, where the patriarchal nature of the society tends to favour boys than girls in terms of access to education. In fact, these findings supports

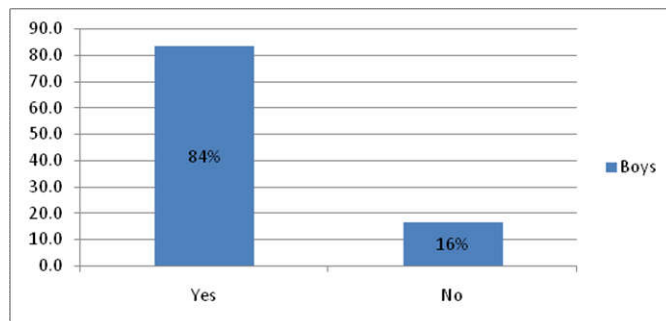


Figure 3. Status of school attendance for boys in the study area

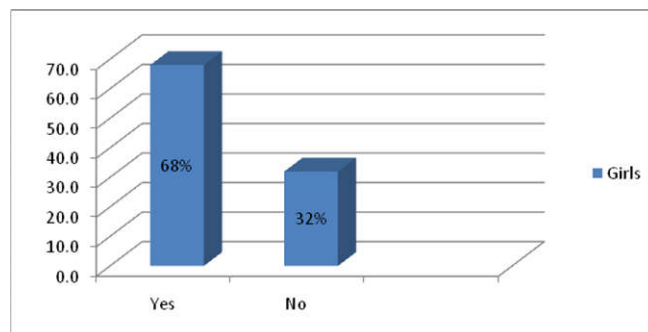


Figure 4. Status of school attendance for girls in the study area

Effects of Children Dropping out of School on Access for Girls

The variable children dropping out of school was included to have a clue of the children who have stopped schooling. The variable is considered important because it may provide insights on the ability of households to sustain the needs of family members. Figure 5 and 6, contains the findings of the study.

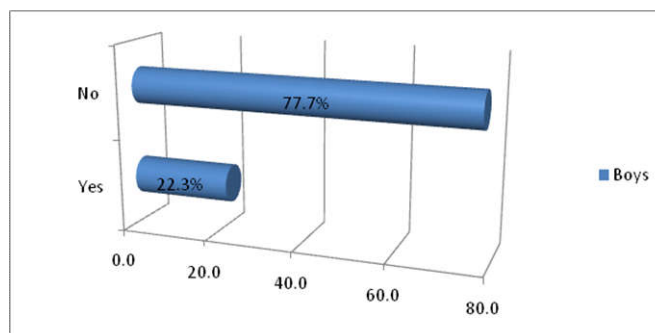


Figure 5. Status of boys dropping out of school

Figure 5 shows that over one fifth (22%) of the respondents, acknowledged that their boys had dropped out of school, while over three quarters (78%), said that their boys were in school. The findings of the study with more boys in school than those who have dropped out is a reflection of the Nigerian society where the boy child is supported more to be in school compared to girls. The 22% who were said to have dropped

out of school were reported to be due to poverty in their families and other reasons such as truancy and peer pressure. In Figure 6 we report the status of students dropping out of school for girls. More precisely, Figure 6 reveals that over half (58%) of the respondents reported that their daughters had dropped out of school, with slightly over two fifths (42%) saying that their girls were still in school. The higher (58%) number of girls dropping out of school is a mirror of the Nigerian society where girls are supported less to remain in school. The patriarchy nature of the society forces girls to drop out of school paving way for their early debut in marriage. The study was told, where there are boys and girls in the household, the girl child may be sacrificed in marriage and her bride price used to finance the education of her male siblings.

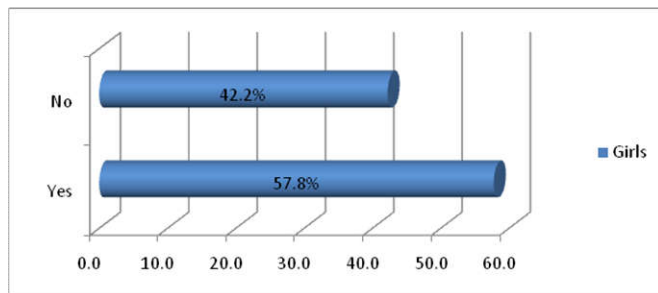


Figure 6. Status of girls dropping out of school

The finding that over two fifths (42.2%) of girls drop out of school implies that girls are not sustained in schools despite them joining the education system. This finding corroborates that of Undiyaundeye and Igiri, (2015) when they revealed that parental investment behavior concerning the irrelevance of girls' education, influences female children access to education as a basic human right.

Effects of Household Preferred Child to Access Education on the Girl Child

The variable household preference refers to whom among the children, boys and girls, are given the first opportunity when it comes to accessing education in Bali LGA. The variable was intended to measure the attitude of parents, especially household heads, with regard to the belief that girls are a weaker sex and of lesser value than boys, which is founded in patriarchy. Figure 5, contains the summary of the findings on this variable.

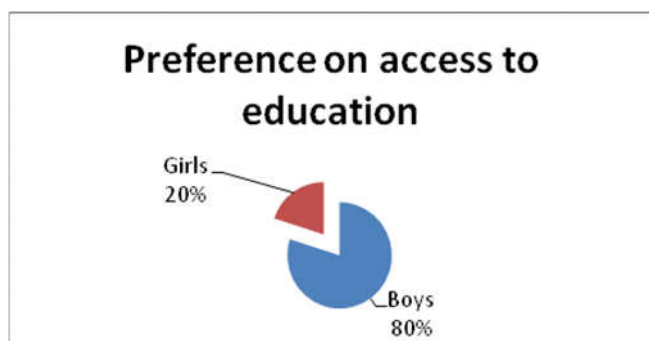


Figure 5. Preference on educational access

Figure 5, reveals that four fifths (80%) of the respondents were of the view that they would give educational priority to boys, while only one fifth (20%) mentioned girls. From the finding, it is obvious that a high (80%) percentage of the respondents would prefer to send boys over girls to school. This finding is a

typical reflection of the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, especially Bali LGA. Imperatively, the high (80%) preference on boys has implications on the girl child access to primary education. However, this finding is not a surprise to this study as it mirrors the observed situation in Nigeria. Indeed, the findings of this study are in line with those of De Kadtet *et al.*, (2014), who affirm that preference for sons in terms of education tends to exclude the girl child and young women, where resources are directed towards sons and young men in many families in Africa. Boys' preference is deeply embedded in the culture of some countries. Boys carry family name, can continue the family trade, and expected to provide for their parents in old age, girls are given less care, nourishment, access to family resources and above all access to education than their brothers. Farah *et al.* (2018). Girls are lost to their family of origin, the starkest indicator of male preference is the one hundred million "missing women" worldwide. (Ibid). This culture has drastically affected girls' access to education a key millennium development goal. In addition, when we probed the participants further to establish the discrepancy, we were informed in many households in Bali LGA Nigeria that:

".....family efforts and education are invested on the boy-child because they are makers of the clan, while the girl-child is expected to be married and her husband is culturally supposed to speak for the spouse".

In another interview with a male participant, the narrative was that:

".....many poor and large families prefer to educate the boy-child for family continuity, the headship of household and property inheritances are designated for the boy child since girls marry and go away from their homes".

Thus, within the framework of patriarchy on one hand, boys are expected to inherit their parents' property and hence maintain their family's name, status, wealth and lineage. In this regard, family power is entrusted on boys and parents prefer educating them so that they could have a better understanding and grasp of how to run the family efficiently in their demise and perpetuate the family legacy. From the discussions with the participants during the study one would deduce that the boy child in Bali LGA is seen to be more superior, brave and courageous. Further, he is regarded as the family security and expected to gain more knowledge on how to protect the family. On the other hand, girls are supposed to be married and their spouse family becomes their new home and family. Thus, they cannot make decisions for their birth or "original" family. This is because boys are viewed as the voice and decision makers of the community in Bali LGA.

Conclusion

From the findings, it was noted that girls are more likely to drop out of school, because of larger family sizes, most of the families in the study area tended to be polygamous in nature with many members to contend with, and this actually has implication on girl-child access to primary education. The cultural factors which include family size and preference on access to education in this study, greatly affects girls access to education. The researcher found out that most parents in the study locale have larger family sizes, hence the choice of whom to send to school here becomes critical, as the girl-child is mostly left behind. Where basic needs such as food, shelter

and clothing can hardly be met by parents of girls due to the burden of large family size, girls education simply becomes a non-priority focus for the households in Bali LGA.

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