

Achieving Its Objective: Has the Universal Basic Education Policy Increased the School Enrolment of the Girl Child?

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Abstract

Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of out of school children globally, with the girl child accounting for 60 per cent of this figure. To find a solution to the high number of out-of-school children and the dire state of public-run schools, improve the existing curriculum and educational policy. The Government of Olusegun Obasanjo introduced the Universal Basic Education Policy. The policy objective is to provide nine (9) years of free and compulsory primary and junior secondary education from ages 6 to 15. Adopting the ex-post facto research method, the study examines the impact of the Universal Basic Education policy on school enrollment of the girl child in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Data for the study was collected using qualitative and quantitative methods from 390 participants from Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria. Data analysis was carried out hypothesis by hypothesis at a 95 per cent confidence level. Data analyzed revealed a significant impact of the Universal Basic Education policy on school enrolments of the girl child. The government should increase and improve its supervisory mechanism in public schools to check for illegal school fees being collected by school management, among others.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education, School enrolment, girl child.

1. Introduction

The role of education in the development of human society cannot be overemphasized. Education performs a function that no other institution in society performs. In itself, education is a right that all human in the society is entitled to and is a major force in economic, social, cultural and intellectual empowerment. It helps bring about attitudinal and behavioural change that helps reshape human ability, bringing about progress and development (Burtch, 2006; Charles, Ikoh, Iyamba & Charles, 2007; Etan, Frank, Bisong, Angioha, Abang & Akande, 2021). No society will meet its developmental goals without developing its manpower through education (Adeyanju, 2010). Hence, the educational system is the medium through which positive transformation occurs (Adeyanju, 2010). The lives of women in developing nations are improving drastically due to globalization. However, these improvements have not reached their male counterpart's level, especially in developing countries. They remain disadvantaged in diverse areas, especially in the area of education. The United Nation's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2020) reported that 132 million girl children are out of school globally. This figure includes 34.3 million girl children of primary school age. UNESCO (2020) also reported that more than 15 million girls of primary school age are unlikely to see the inside of a primary school classroom. Nine of the ten nations with the worst girl child education are in sub-Saharan Africa (Owen, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). In the region, more than 9 million girls between the ages of six and eleven have never been in a school classroom (UNESCO 2020).

Nigeria has one of the worst girl child education statistics. According to Ishaku (2021), more than 13.2 million children are out of school, and the girl child accounts for an estimated 60 per cent of this figure. The north has the highest out of school female children. 52.3 per cent in the North-East and 52.7 per cent in the Northwest, means that more than half of the female children aged 6-15 have never been in a classroom in their lifetime (UNICEF, 2020). In 2018, the country ranked first as the nation with the highest out of school girl child (Amao, 2019; Lawal, 2018). Although, cross river state has one of the lowest amounts of out of school children. 97,919 out of school children, according to the National Bureau

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of Statistics (2020), is still considered high in a state of 3 million people. The girl child accounts for 61 per cent of this figure (Akinpelu, 2021; Abbas, 2021). Pervasive poverty, patrilineal ideologies at the community and household level, lack of schools, its infrastructures are among the major factors contributing to the high number of out of school children, especially the girl child.

In an attempt to reduce the number of out of school children in Nigeria, the Olusegun Obasanjo government passed the Universal Basic Education Act in 1999 to provide free and equitable education for every Nigerian child aged 6 and 15 (FGN, 2004; Kolade, 2019; Nafiu 2013; Gabriel, 2013). The program, which took off in April 2004, provides free and compulsory education for primary and junior secondary school children. Since the take-off of the programme, available evidence shows that appreciable success has been recorded in the number of school enrolment of children between the ages of 6 and 15 in most states in Nigeria, especially in the area of the girl child school enrollment (Igbineemeka & Adeyemi, 2015; Salifu, Brateng & Kendezore, 2018; Omang, & Angioha, 2021; Ajor., Eneji, & Omang 2020; Uyang, Ojong-Ejoh, & Ejeje, 2017). Therefore, one would have expected that with the success of the Universal Basic Education Policy, as evident in empirical studies in most states, the same would be attainable in Cross River State, especially in Calabar South. However, this is not the case, as there are hardly studies that have looked at the impact of the Universal Basic Education Policy on school enrollment, especially in the area of girl child enrollment. This study is set to bridge this gap by accessing the impact of the UBE Policy in school enrolment of the girl child in Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Area

The study area is Calabar South, one of the 18 Local Government Areas in Cross River State, Nigeria. It is situated in the Southern part of Cross River State. The Local Government Area covers an area of 287.303 km and a population of 191,630 (NPC, 2006). Politically the local government area is divided into 12 political wards, with its headquarters at Anantigha. The area is dominated by the Efik and Efuts ethnic groups. English and Efik is the dominant language in the area. Most of the people in this area are civil servants and businessmen, and women. The local government area has numerous public schools.

2.2. Research Approach and Instrumentation

The ex post facto design was considered appropriate for this study. This method allows a researcher to study a phenomenon after it has already occurred. This method enables the researcher to adopt qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection. The quantitative method uses a self-developed semi-structured interview questionnaire to collect data from households with female children between the ages of 6 and 15 who attend public schools in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The qualitative method involves an In-dept interview conducted using an interview schedule. The researcher also used documentary analysis for data collection. The documentary data was record of over four years of student enrollment, collected from five public schools in Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria.

2.3. Sampling

The target population are parents in households with female children between the ages of 6 and 15 in public schools in Calabar South, Cross River State. The sample size for the study is 390. Three hundred eighty-four (384) samples provided quantitative data. This was arrived at using the Survey Monkey Sample Size Technique at a 95 per cent confidence level and a margin of error of 5 per cent.

The Survey Monkey Sampling Determination Technique =

Population Size : 191,630

Confidence Level (%) : 95%

Margin of Error (%) : 5

Sample size : 384

This figure was reliable to provide enough information on the topic under discussion. The six samples for the qualitative data were arrived at by the researcher, who purposively selected two school heads and four parents of female children who attend public schools in the study area.

To select the sample from the study area, Calabar South was divided into twelve clusters based on the twelve local government area that makes up the local government. From the twelve clusters, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique to select 8 wards. These wards are selected because they play host to public schools. The selected wards are 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11. The researcher purposively selected these wards because of their proximity to schools and easy access to the researcher. Out of the 8 selected wards, the researcher purposively selected two streets each from the eight wards. Table 3.1 shows the streets used for the study. The researcher then used the simple random sampling procedure to select 24 households from the 8 purposively selected streets. The actual respondents of the study are parents in household.

Table1. Showing the selected streets according to the wards

S/N	Wards	Street 1	Street 2
1	Ward 1	Goldie	Atu
2	Ward 3	Offiong Street	Watts
3	Ward 4	Edgerley	Henshaw
4	Ward 6	Nelson Mandela	Target
5	Ward 8	Edibe Dibe	Eyo Etta
6	Ward 9	Palm Street	Nyong Edem
7	Ward 10	Murray	Webber Street
8	Ward 11	Ekpo Abasi	Anantigha

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

2.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected using questionnaire was checked and cleaned using SPSS version 21. Preliminary analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics before the results were subjected to parametric statistics using linear regression at 0.05 confidence level. Documentary analysis was data collected from 5 schools to check the number of girl child that was enrolled over four years. Qualitative data collection through the in-depth interview was analyzed thematically using content analysis.

3. Findings and Discussion

From the Three hundred and eighty-four (384) copies of the questionnaires administered, three-hundred and sixty-three (371) were retrieved. The remaining thirteen (13) copies of the questionnaire were either not completed or were wrongly filled..

3.1. Documentary Analysis of Data Collected

As presented in Table 2 and figure 1, the average number of enrolments of the girl child has improved. In school A, the number of girls enrolled in basic education were 150, 160, 170, 184 in 2016; 2017; 2018 and 2019 school year respectively. A similar trend was observed in school B. The number of girls enrolled in basic education was 160, 167, 188 and 190 in 2016; 2017; 2018 and 2019 school year, respectively. Also, in school C, the number of girls who enrolled for basic education were 172, 184, 191 and 200 in 2016; 2017; 2018 and 2019 school year, respectively. Likewise, in school D, the number of girls enrolled for basic education was 191, 199, 204 and 213 in 2016; 2017; 2018 and 2019, respectively. A different observation is recorded in school D, the number of girls who enrolled for basic education were 157, 201, 224 and 143 in 2016 - 2018, but there was a decline in 2019 school year. Thus, we could conclude that enrolment of female wards in the study area has improved.

3.2. Descriptive Presentation of Results

Collected data using questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive analysis such as tables, simple percentages and graphical illustration. From data gathered from households, 163 households (43.9%) had one female child or ward aged

between 6 and 16 years. 125 (33.8%) families had 2 female children or wards. 63 (20.5%) households had 3 female children or wards. 17 (5.5%) households had 4 female children or wards, with only 5 (1.3%) having five and above female children or ward aged 6 and 16.

Table 2. Enrolments of female students from 2015 – 2018 school year

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E
Year 2016	150	160	172	191	157
Year 2017	160	167	184	199	201
Year 2018	170	188	191	204	224
Year 2019	184	190	200	213	143

Source: Field survey, 2021

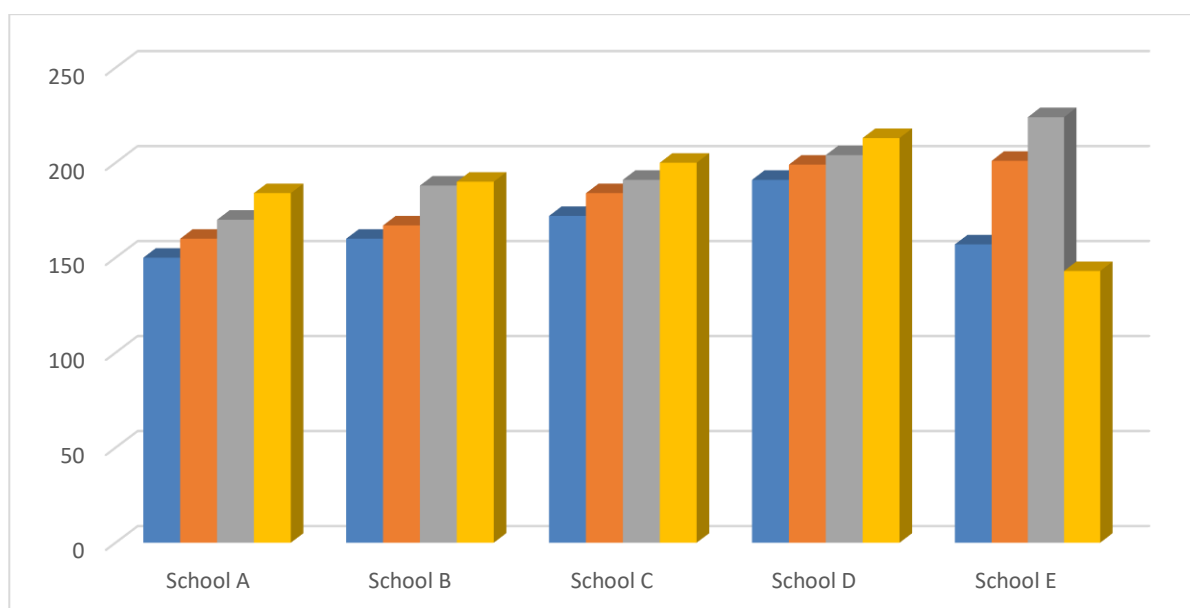


Figure 1. Enrolments of female students from 2016 – 2019 school years

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents by number of female children aged 6 and 16

Number of girl children	Frequency	Percentage (%)
One	163	43.9
Two	125	33.8
Three	63	20.5
Four	17	5.5
Five and above	5	1.3
Total	371	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2021

Data revealed that 298 (80.3%) of the household members given the research instrument reported that all the female children or wards aged between 6 and 15 attend school. In comparison, 73 (19.7%) reported that not all female children or ward attend school.

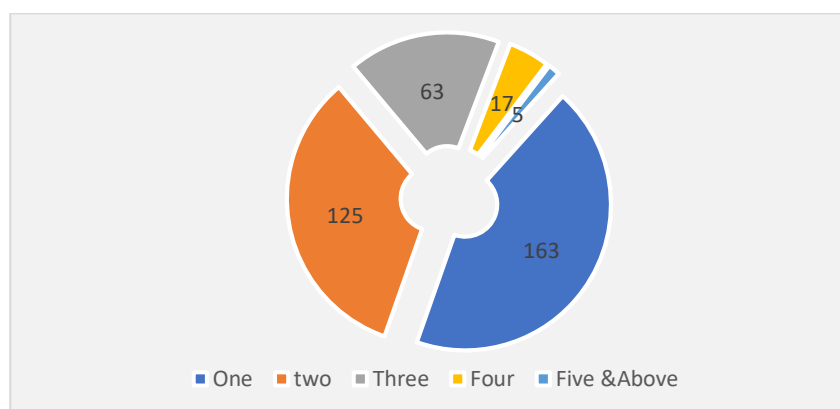


Figure 2. Distribution of Number of Female Children & Wards in Each Household

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents on if all female children in the households between the ages of 6 and 16 attend school

All female children in households between the ages of 6 and 16 attend school	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	298	80.3
No	73	19.7
I do not know	0	0
Total	371	100.0

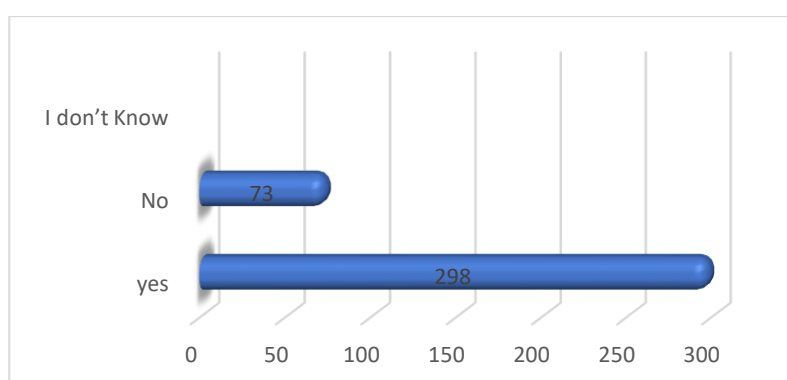


Figure 3. Distribution of all female children in the households between the ages of 6 and 16 attending school

Data also revealed that 61 (16.4%) households send their girl child or ward to school because education is free. 49 (13.2%) reported sending their girl child or ward to school because they are expected to send them to school. 175(47.2%) send their female children or ward to school because they want to, and finally, 86(23.2%) reported all of the above.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of respondents on why they can send their daughters to school

How they can send their daughters to school	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education is free	61	16.4
Because I am expected to send them	49	13.2
I want my daughter(s) educated	175	47.2
All of the above	86	23.2
Total	371	100.0

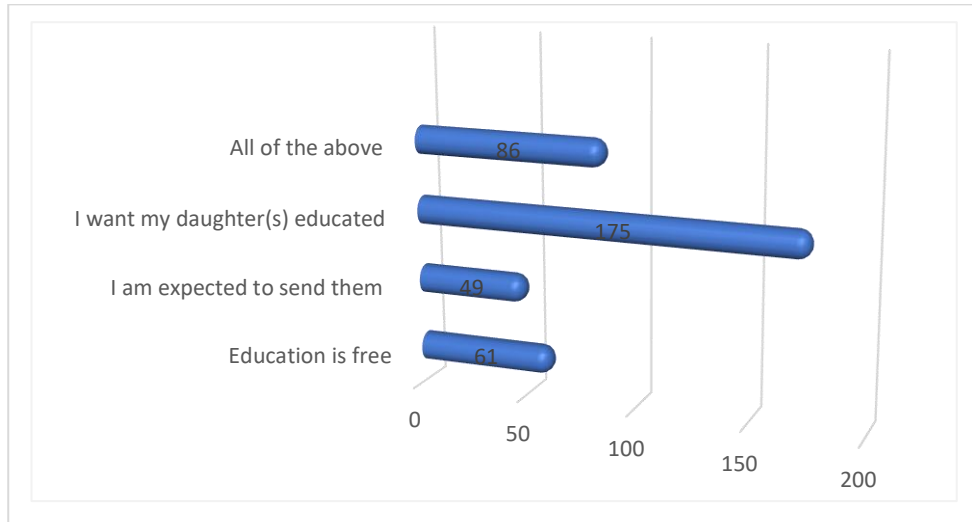


Figure 4. Distribution of why they can send their daughters to school

Data also revealed that 298(80.3%) of the respondent reported that UBE Policy made it possible for parents to send their female children or wards to school despite the economic situation in the nation. 73 (19.7%) reported No.

Table 6. Percentage distribution of respondents on has the Universal Basic Education Policy made it possible for you to send your female children to school despite the economic situation in the nation

UBE made it possible for you to send your female children or ward to school	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	298	80.3
No	73	19.7
I do not know	0	0
Total	371	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2021

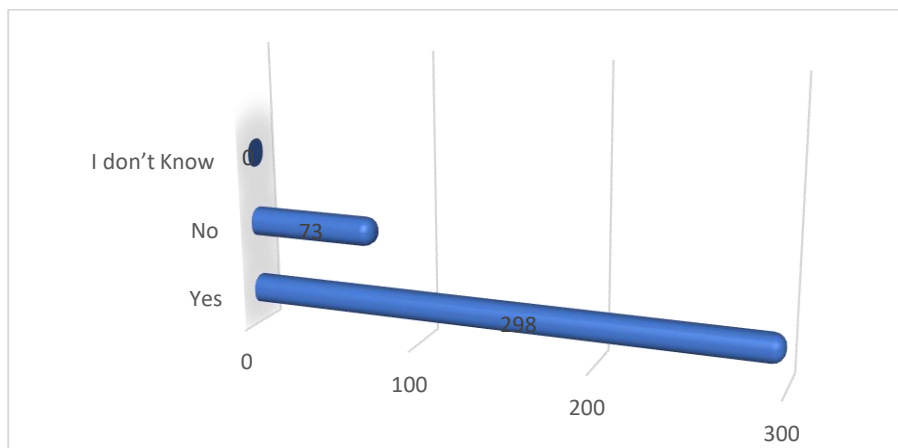


Figure 5. The distribution of respondents on UBE policy made it possible for you to send your female children or ward to school.

Data also revealed that 235(63.3%) reported that most parents in the area would not send their children or ward to school if not for the universal basic education. 19(5.1%) report no, and 117 reported they do not know.

Table 7. Percentage distribution of respondents on many parents in the area would not have been able to send their female children or ward to school if not for the UBE Policy me

Parents in the area would not have been able to send their female children or ward to school if not for the UBE Policy me	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	235	63.3
No	19	5.1
I do not know	117	31.5
Total	371	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2021

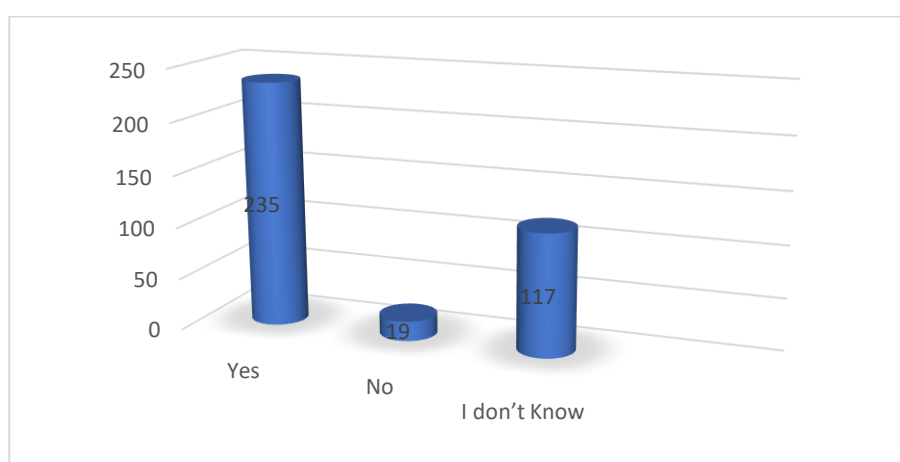


Figure 6. Distribution of respondents on parents in the area would not have been able to send their female children or ward to school if not for the UBE Policy me

3.3. Parametric Analysis

Simple Lineal regression was adopted to analyze the effect of the Universal Basic Education Policy on the school enrolment of the girl child. Analysis was carried out at 0.05 confidence level, and the result is presented in table 8.

Table 8. Summary simple linear regression analysis: universal basic education policy and school enrolment of the girl child

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sig
Regression	17150.972	2	17150.972	41.798	.284 ^a	.061	.060	.000 ^a
Residual	195267.691	369	149.401					
Total	212418.663	369						

a. Predictors variable: Universal Basic Education Policy

b. Dependent Variable: School Enrolment of the Girl Child

Table 8 result revealed R-value of .284^a $R^2 = .081$, adjusted $R^2 = .060$, $p = .000^a$ and $< .05$ for relationship between Universal Basic Education Policy and school enrolment of the girl child. The R-value (Correlation coefficient) is a standardized measure of an observed degree of relationship between variables, it is a commonly used measure of the size of an effect, and values of $\pm .1$ represent a small effect, $\pm .3$ is a medium effect, and $\pm .5$ is a large effect.

The R^2 -value of .061 implies that 61% of the total variance of school enrolment is accounted for by the predictor variable (Universal Basic Education Policy). The regression ANOVA revealed that the $F(2, 107) 41.798$; $p < .000$, is

significant, this, therefore, implies that there is a significant relationship (association) between the predictor variable (Universal Basic Education Policy) and school enrolment of the girl child. The adjusted R^2 (.060) shows some shrinkage of the unadjusted R-value (.061), indicating that the model could be generalized to the population.

Based on the results, it was concluded that; the Universal Basic Education Policy has significantly increased the school enrolment of the girl child in Calabar South, Cross River State, Nigeria.

3.4. Discussion of Findings

3.4.1. Documentary Analysis

The Universal Basic Education policy was passed in 1999 to provide free and compulsory basic education for children between 6 and 15 years. However, despite progress in school enrollment, The nation is still among the worst globally in the school enrollment rate, and female children make up 60 per cent of children out of school. Using documentary analysis, a semi-structured questionnaire, and an In-dept interview guide, this study attempted to analyze the impact of the UBE Policy on school enrollment of the girl child. In the documentary analysis carried out, data was collected from five public schools from Calabar South. This data contained the number of new enrollments over four years, between 2016 and 2019. There were three (3) public primary schools and two (2) public junior secondary schools. The schools are named school A to school E.

For school A, there was a 22.6 per cent increase of enrollment of female pupils from a figure of 150 in 2016 to 184 in 2019. In school B, there was an 18.8 per cent increase in female pupils enrollment from a figure of 160 in 2016 to 190 female enrollment in 2019. School C had a 16.3 per cent increase from 172 enrolled female pupils in 2016 to 200 enrolled female pupils in 2019. School D had an increase of 11.5 per cent from a figure of 191 in 2016 to 213 in 2019. In school E, there was an increase of 42.7 per cent from a figure of 157 in 2016 to 224 in 2018, but this figure reduced by 36.2 per cent between 2018 and 2019 from 224 to 143. From the data gathered from the five public schools, there was an 11.7 per cent increase in public school enrollment for the public schools studied from the period of 2016 and 2019. This result from the documentary analysis revealed a considerable increase in school enrollment of female children due to the Universal Basic Education Policy.

This finding supports Aliyu (2015), whose study on the impact of the UBE on school enrollment in selected local government areas in Kwara state found a progressive increase in the number of school enrollment as a result of the UBE Policy. Issah (2016) study on ten public schools revealed that the UBE policy had increased school enrollment and retention in public schools.

3.4.2. Descriptive and parametric statistics

Data collected using a semi-structured questionnaire was first analyzed using descriptive analysis before being subjected to linear regression analysis. The study area is a semi-urban area with a large percentage of the families considered poor or middle-income earning families. The analysis revealed that most of the households that data was collected from had a small family, with 43.9 per cent reporting only one female child or ward between the ages of 6 and 15 years. 33.8 per cent of the household has two female children or ward, 20.5 per cent of the households have three female children or ward between the ages of 6 and 15; 4.5 per cent reported four female children or ward between the ages of 6 and 15, with only 1.3 per cent reporting 5 and above female children or ward.

80.3 per cent of the households that data was gathered from reported that all female children or wards attend school. 19.7 per cent of the household reported that not all children attend school. A large percentage (42.7%) of the respondents in the household that data was collected from reported that they send their daughters or wards to school because they want to. 16.4 per cent reported that it is because education is free, with just 13.2 per cent reporting that they send their daughter or wards to school. A large percentage (80.3%) of the household reported that the universal basic education policy made it possible for their female children or wards to attend school. This is because the policy offers free education for the first nine years of education, from primary to junior secondary school. Only 17.7 per cent reported that is not just the reason that they send their wards to school

The result from the descriptive analysis was subjected to linear regression analysis at 0.05 confidence level. The result from the analysis revealed a significant association between the Universal Basic Education Policy and school enrolment of the girl child. This is because the analysis revealed an R-value of .284^a $R^2 = .081$, adjusted $R^2 = .060$, $p = .000^a$ and

< .05 for relationship between Universal Basic Education Policy and school enrolment of the girl child. The R^2 -value of .061 implies that 6.1% of the total variance of school enrolment is accounted for by predictor variable (Universal Basic Education Policy). This implies a significant relationship (association) between the predictor variable (Universal Basic Education Policy) and school enrolment of the girl child. Studies such as Uzomah and Okereke (2010), Nelson, Moses, and Olufemi (2019) supports this finding.

3.4.3. Qualitative Analysis

In-depth interview was also conducted to assess the impact of the UBE Policy on school enrolment. The principal of a secondary school in Anantigha, Calabar South, was interviewed. On the impact of the UBE policy, she argued that with the introduction of the UBE Policy me, the number of girl children who attend schools has increased, as parents who could not afford to send their wards to school can now do so. She argued

Calabar South is predominantly rural, and most of the people who reside in the Local Government are poor, so the free tuition allows them to send their wards to school.

On rumours of schools collecting illegal fees. In her word;

The rumour has been going around that schools are collecting fees from pupils. I think that is untrue. The government is already paying for these students' fees, so why should we ask students to pay fees. You should be aware that any school staff found collecting money from the pupil will be fired. I do not know any of my colleagues who ask their pupils to pay fees. Maybe it is those things that we ask them to bring, such as brooms, cane and tissue papers, and parent-teacher association dues, that they are asked to pay.

On recording increase in school enrolment, especially that of female pupils, she responded;

Yes, parents are becoming enlightened and seeing the importance of the girl child and their usefulness, and with schools being free as a result of the UBE scheme, the number of girls in schools is increasing by the day. (IDI/Female/Principal, Secondary School/ Anantigha Calabar South Local Government Area).

A parent was also interviewed in Ekpo Abasi. However, he maintained that he had five children and earned just 55 thousand naira as a civil servant, with schools being free. He has been able to give his children at least basic education. He reported;

I am a civil servant with a salary that is not enough t take care of my family and me. Thank God for free education. People like me can send their children to school without worrying about fees except for those small things teachers ask the children to bring.

On sending his daughters to school. He respondents;

I have three daughters, who are all in school. The Government policy of free education has helped people like me in that aspect. By the grace of God, all my girls are in school. The most senior is Junior Secondary School (JSS 2), and the government's free education policy has made this possible.

Another father interviewed reported that the government policy of free education through the UBE Policy has enabled him to send his three daughters to school. In his words

The salary I earn in the state civil service is too small to take care of my family of six in the current economic situation, so is it from this salary that I will be able to send all my children to school? The free education by the government has helped reduce the burden of raising school fees every three months. The free education has helped to make me worry about just how to provide uniforms and other small payments in school for my children.

A single mother of two daughters in the Anantigha, Calabar South was also interviewed. She reported that the UBE policy has enabled her daughters to attend the public school in their area. She argued.

I do not have anybody to assist me in taking care of my daughters. My husband left us after I gave birth to the second girl, so I care for them from my petty business's little profit. It would have been difficult for them to attend school because I have to think first about their feeding. We can hardly survive on what I make already then for me to start thinking of paying school fees. My daughters' school only asks them to pay very little and bring a few items, but that is all.

Another father whose daughter attends one of the junior public schools in the area argued that the provisions of the UBE made it possible for parents to send their children to school no matter the economic situation. In his words,

The provisions of the UBE Policy made many families send their children to school, especially female children. For me, an educated man. I would have still sent my daughter to school no matter what, as I know the importance of sending girl children to school. However, the program has made it easy by providing free education and essentials such as good classrooms.

A principal in one of the public primary schools was interviewed on how the UBE policy helped increase the school enrollment of female pupils. She argued that the communities around the school are most poor, and the families around are struggling to scrape by on the meagre income they make. The provisions of the UBE policy made it easy for them to send their children to school. On the increase of female pupils in her school, she responded.

Most parents in the communities surrounding the school still live in a patrilineal society where training a girl child is seen as not useful. So spending money to train their female children is seen as a waste of time, but the UBE, which provides free education, allows them not to spend money on school fees, so they allow them to attend.

She was asked to respond to rumours of school using other means to collect money from students. She responded;

that is wrong. I do not know about other schools, but apart from the parent-teacher association (PTA) fees of 500 naira that the children are asked to pay and things such as tissue papers for their use that they are asked to bring, nobody request money from their pupils.

On the increase in female student enrollment, she reported.

Records show that there has been a continuous increase in enrollment of female pupils over the years. This can be attributed to the UBE policy, parents becoming enlightened about the importance of training a girl child.

The findings align with the quantitative analysis, meaning that the Universal Basic Education Policy significantly affects the school enrolment rate among girls in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examines the impact of universal basic education policy on school enrolments of the girls' child in Calabar south local government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. From the analysis of data gathered from the field, the result revealed a significant impact of the Universal Basic Education on school enrolments of the girl child. From this finding, it is without a doubt that the current Universal Basic Education policy is a verse improvement on other and previous educational policies put forward by the Nigerian government. However, it is easier to create policies but very difficult to follow up on them in terms of implementation, execution, measurement, and evaluation. Therefore, the success of the Universal Basic Education policy rest solely on the government readiness to pursue its success with proper implementation, execution and measurement and evaluation. Based on the finding, the study thereby recommends that;

- (i) The government should increase and improve significantly on its supervisory and inspectorial roles in public schools in Calabar South Local Government Area to help check the anomalies in the area of illegal fees being collected from students, which could be hampering the percentage of the girl child enrolment.

Government should sensitize the public and create more awareness on the need and prominence of educating the girl child and end gender parity in education within Nigeria

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