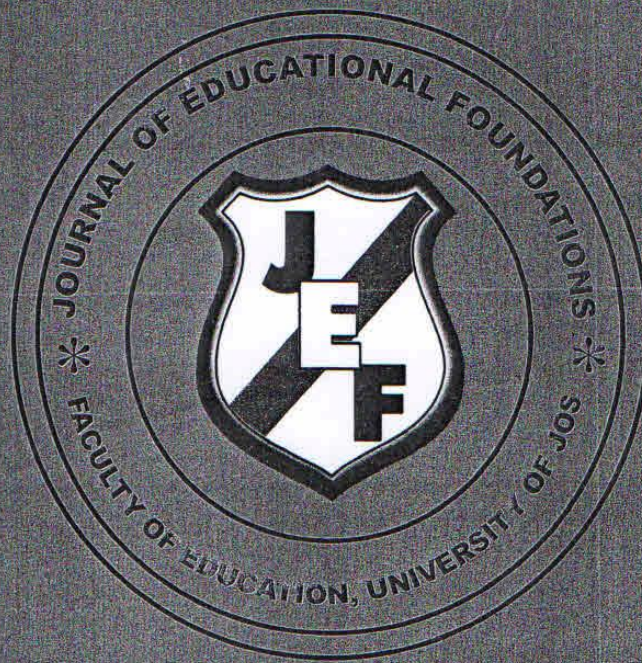


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Attitude of Religious Leaders in Ilorin Metropolis Towards Girl-Child Education

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Abstract

Girl-child education has been a major subject of serious concern particularly in Nigeria. There have been various forms of discriminations, limitations and poor perceptions about girl-child education especially in some states in the northern parts of the country. This study therefore investigated attitude of religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State towards girl-child education. The descriptive method was used to conduct the study in which 186 religious leaders were selected at Christian and Muslim worship centres in Ilorin metropolis. A self-developed instrument titled "Attitude Towards Girl-Child Education Questionnaire" (ATGEQ) was used to collect the data. The findings revealed that respondents showed positive attitude towards girl-child education. However, a significant difference existed in the attitude of respondents based on religious affiliation and level of education. It was therefore recommended that guidance counsellors and other policy makers in the education sector should actively involve religious leaders in the campaigns on girl-child education.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights. It promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits. However, one of the worrisome phenomena contending with meaningful development in Nigeria is gender imbalance in terms of educational opportunity. According to Trading Economics (2014), the combined gross enrolment for primary, secondary and tertiary schools for females in Nigeria was 57% compared to 71% for males in 2002. Although the issue of gender disparity could be viewed as a global phenomenon, it however important to note that there is variation across countries and parts of each country. The United Nations International Children Educational Fund (UNICEF) (2001) pointed out that in all levels of education in Nigeria, there are more boys enrolled in schools than girls most especially in the northern states of the country, where Ilorin metropolis belongs. This submission was corroborated by Aja-Okorie (2013) who reported that, as at 2010 more than two thirds of 15-19 years old girls in Northern Nigeria are denied education. This trend has posed a great challenge to the achievement of the overall aims of education in Nigeria and consequently the national goal of building an egalitarian society and provision of equal opportunity for the entire citizen as contained in the National Policy on Education (2013). By way of definition, a girl-child can be viewed as a biological female person from birth to 18 years of age: the period that precedes adulthood. Thus, the challenges of girl child's inadequate participation in education can be better appreciated when the phenomenon is juxtaposed with meaning and purpose of education.

Education can be viewed as the aggregate of all process by means of which a person develops abilities, attitude and other forms of worthwhile behaviour in the society. Akogun (2010) inferred that education is the greatest legacy a society can boast of and the most powerful instrument of social change, economic, political, cultural, as well as scientific and technological development. This may simply imply that any child that fails or is denied the opportunity to acquire education has lost a great inheritance. In a similar term, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), in the National Policy on Education (2013), defined education as a process that helps to develop the individual physically, mentally, morally, politically, socially and technologically into a complete person in order to enable him or her to function adequately in any environment. The purpose of education is thus to produce well functioning individual that will contribute positively to the development of the society. On this *terra firma*, the Federal Government of Nigeria convincingly adopted education as an instrument par excellence for national development. Education is therefore central to development and improvement of the nation's holistic welfare. However, such purpose can only be achieved in an atmosphere of egalitarianism, particularly with special emphasis on education.

The normative instruments of the United Nations laid down international legal obligations for the right to education. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that everyone, irrespective of gender, has the right to education and that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom (UNESCO, 2000). Equally, the Federal Government of Nigeria, in 2003, adopted the Child Rights Act to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2010). By implication, any child denied of the right to education is marginalized socially, vocationally, psychologically, spiritually, physically, and economically. This is because the child will not benefit from educational programme directed to the full development of personality and potential which could generate adequate functioning in the society.

Despite the emphasis on equal right to education by international agencies such as the UN and UNESCO, there still exists disparity between the boys and girls participation in education in Nigeria. In 2003, according to Sako-John (2005), out of an estimated 7.2 million children that were out of school in Nigeria, over 4 million were girls. Furthermore, the UNESCO's reports constantly showed that for over 10 years (1996-2007) more than 60% of adult illiterates in Nigeria are female (UNESCO, 2013). The worrisome proportion of illiterate female adults is as a result of girl-child's poor participation in education. In Kwara State, the Annual School Census (ASC) enrolments for Junior Secondary School (JSS) were 33,500 for girls and 40,200 for boys in 2004/2005 while that of Senior Secondary School (SSS) were 30,000 for girls and 36,000 for boys. (Bennell, Chete & Jimoh, 2007). Furthermore, 16.0% girls of ages 15-19 never attended school.

Magaji (2010) is of the opinion that even though education is regarded as a human right for the realization of human dignity, many factors have been found to be responsible for the low enrolment of girls into schools when compared to the enrolment of boys. Among the factors highlighted are poverty, socio-cultural practices, religious, misinterpretation of the holy books, early marriage and gender biases.

Religious view alone can stand out as a major impediment to girl-child education since the individual is guided by the dictates of the injunction of the religious doctrines. Commenting on the words of Karl Marx that "religion is the opium of the people," Ajiboye (2002) stated that religion is not better than a drug which people are addicted to and thus controls their philosophy as well as attitude towards an issue. By implication, the views of religious leaders in most cases determine the beliefs and attitude of the masses to a particular phenomenon. It is therefore imperative to carryout a study on attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education. In addition, Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria is popularly acknowledged as the city of Islamic clerics' (Ilu Alfa) where one can easily find large number of well versed Islamic religious leaders and Christian clerics (religious leaders) because of the presence of many worship centres (Ajiboye, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Education is central to development and improvement of individual and the nation at large. It is acknowledged by the Federal Government of Nigeria as meaningful development (FGN, 2013). Education could therefore, emancipate people from poverty, poor health, unemployment and other socio-economic crises. However, United Nations statistics and other reports repeatedly show that girls have lower literacy rates than boys, particularly in Nigeria (Bukar, 2011). In Kwara State (where Ilorin stands as the capital city), 16.0% girls of ages 15-19 never attended school (Bennell, Chete & Jimoh, 2007). Amadi (2013) found that family background, size, and the socio-economic situation in the community are responsible for limited access of the girl-child education in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Eweniyi (2013) found that parent favoured boy's education more and regard girl's education as a waste since they will end up in the kitchen. The present study therefore investigated attitude of religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis towards girl-child education.

Purpose of the Study

This study was aimed at investigating attitude of religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis towards girl-child education. The study was equally purposed to determine whether or not respondents differed in their attitude towards girl-child education based on religious affiliation and educational qualification.

Research Questions

Based on the background to the study and the statement of the problem, a research question was raised.

What is the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education?

Hypotheses

Based on the research questions raised, the following null hypotheses were formulated.

1. There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim religious leaders in their attitude towards girl-child education.
2. There is no significant difference between religious leaders with secondary education and below and those with post secondary education in their attitude towards girl-child education.

Methods

Research Design

The study adopted the descriptive research design which is suitable for the description of attitude, opinions or interest of a large number of people (Trochim, 2006). Thus, the method is considered appropriate because the study investigated the attitude of religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis towards girl-child education using a representative sample and later drew inference on the population.

Participants

The population for the study comprises all religious leaders from both Christianity and Islam within Ilorin metropolis. The choice of limiting the scope to the two religions was informed by the fact that they appear popular with many worship centres spread across the locale of the study. A total of 186 respondents were purposively selected across the two religions (Christianity and Islam). Purposive sampling enables researchers to select sample that is most relevant to the focus of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher specifically selected religious clerics (Pastors and Imams) during religious rites because they often coordinate religious activities and their views are usually respected by the followers.

Instruments

A self-developed instrument by the researcher titled "Attitude Towards Girl-Child Education Questionnaire" (ATGEQ) was used to collect the required information. The instrument had two sections. The first section contained personal information of the respondents while the second section contained 15 items, which were constructed to reflect respondents' disposition to girl-child education. The instrument was constructed in a 4-Point Likert Scale pattern on a continuum from Strongly Agree (4 points) to Strongly Disagree (1 point). The midpoint of the scale was 2.50. Hence, any item that had a mean score of 2.50 and above depicts positive attitude towards girl-child education. The highest possible score a respondent can obtain is 60 while the least is 15. A sample item is "As far as I am concerned girl-child education will not expose girls to premarital sex." The instrument possessed reliability coefficient of 0.81 having been subjected to test-retest method of reliability.

Procedure for Data Collection

The data for the study was collected through the administration of questionnaire to the desired respondents. The researcher personally contacted the respondents at worship centres during religious activities. He explained the purpose of the exercise and sought their consent. The instrument was administered to those that agreed to participate. Respondents spent an average of ten minutes to complete the questionnaire form while researcher gave guidance when required.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using frequency counts and percentages for the demographic section while the measure of central tendency (mean score) was used to analyse attitude in response to the research question. The null hypotheses were analysed using the t-test statistics. The t-test is often used to compare the mean of two groups in

research in order to establish their similarity or otherwise (Chong, 2010). The two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

Results

The demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Religion and Educational Qualification

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Religion and Educational Qualification		
Variable	Frequency	Percentage
	Religion	
Christianity	89	47.9
Islam	97	52.1
	Educational Qualification	
Secondary School and below	103	55.4
Post – secondary	83	44.6
Total	186	100.0

The result on Table 1 shows that the frequency of both Christian and Muslim respondents were similar while there are more respondents with secondary education and below than those with post secondary education.

The first research Question 1 asked, What is the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education? The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean items on Attitude Towards Girl-Child Education

As far as I am concerned Girl-Child Education will not...	Mean
Expose girls to premarital sex	2.67
Cause late marriage	2.66
Negatively influence religious doctrines	2.64
Contribute to poor child-rearing practice	2.61
Cause teenage pregnancy	2.58
Often prevent girls from participating in religious activities	2.56
Cause conflicts in marriage	2.55
Promote early sex among girls	2.55
Prevent girls child from involving in domestic chores	2.53
Inculcate spirit of arrogance in women delays childbearing	2.51
Reduce parental control	2.49
Expose girl child to sexual harassment	2.48
Expose girl child to bad dressing	2.47
Contribute to unemployment	2.45
Contribute to termination of pregnancy	2.42

The result in Table 2 revealed that ten out of fifteen items have mean scores above the midpoint of 2.50, which was used to determine the nature of respondents' attitude. Since the structured items are worded in positive terms and patterned in 4-Point Likert Type in a continuum of strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (4-1), the results indicate positive attitude of respondents towards girl-child education. Nevertheless, only five items

reflected negative attitude. The item that ranked first states that "As far as I am concerned, girl-child education will not expose girls to premarital sex" while "will not cause late marriage" ranked second on the rank order table.

The data used to test the null hypotheses were generated through the responses of the participants, which reflected their attitude towards girl-child education. The responses on 4-Point Likert Scale were subjected to the t-test statistics as shown on Tables 3 and 4. The first null hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education on the basis of religious affiliation. The result is in Table 3.

Table 3. t-test comparing attitude towards girl child education based on religious affiliation.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Christianity	89	54.53	5.28	184	2.02*	1.96
Işlam	97	52.02	6.59			

*Significant: $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 3 show that the calculated t-value 2.02 is greater than the critical t-value 1.96. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected; there is significant difference in the attitude of respondents based on religious affiliation. Thus, respondents from Christianity, with a mean of 54.53, had a more positive attitude towards girl child education than those from Islam with a mean of 52.02.

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education on the basis of educational level. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. t-test comparing attitude towards girl child education based on educational level

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal t-value	Crit. t-value
Secondary school and below	103	54.02	5.95	184	2.91*	1.96
Post secondary school education	97	57.85	6.59			

*Significant: $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 4 reveal that the hypothesis was rejected because the calculated t-value 2.91 is greater than the critical t-value 1.96. There is a significant difference in the attitude of respondents based on educational level. Respondents with post secondary education (mean=57.85) showed more positive attitude than those having secondary education and below (mean=54.02).

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate attitude of religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis towards girl-child education. The results revealed that respondents have

positive attitude towards girl-child education on most of the items depicting positive attitude. This finding disagrees with Ishola (2014) in which husbands in Ogun state were shown to have a negative attitude towards wives' participation in higher education. The reason for the disagreement could be that both studies (the previous and present) did not use the same population; Ishola (2014) worked on attitude of husbands while the present study considered attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education. Since the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education is positive, it is likely that respondents have knowledge of the benefits of girl-child's participation in education. In addition, "As far as I am concerned, girl-child education will not expose girls to premarital sex" was most agreed to by the respondents. Probably respondents believed that education will enlighten girls on dangers inherent in premarital sex and thus avoid it. Equally, respondent alluded to "girl-child education will not cause late marriage" and "will not negatively influence religious doctrines" because the items ranked second and third respectively. It could be that education has not been a significantly factor causing late marriage or negative religious practice among female Christian and Muslim faithful.

There was a significant difference in the attitude of respondents towards girl-child education based on religious affiliation. Based on the result of this study, Christian respondents showed more positive attitude towards girl-child education than the Muslim respondents. The present finding agrees with the earlier submission of Ajiboye (2002) where religious leaders from African-Traditional Religion (ATR), Christianity and Islam differed in their attitude towards family planning. Similarly, Bukar (2011) reported that attitude of individuals towards girl-child education differed because of socio-cultural variables. The difference in the attitude of religious leaders from both Christianity and Islam toward girl-child education could be adduced to the dissimilarity in their doctrine particularly issues regarding girl-child. According to Arlandson (2013), Quran permits men to marry prepubescent girls as contained in the Holy Quran 65:4. Conversely Christianity is relatively silent about age of marriage for girls. Since both religions have doctrinal difference on girl-child there is high possibility of expressing different attitude towards girl-child education.

There was significant difference in the attitude of religious leaders towards girl-child education based on educational qualification. Those with post-secondary qualification showed positive attitude more than those with Secondary education and below. This finding negates the earlier study of Alok (2011) who reported no significant difference in the attitude of parents towards female child schooling in Rajasthan. The dissimilarity between the previous and present studies could be attributed to the difference in locale and respondents. The present study showed that level of education is an important variable that determines attitude of religious leaders especially on girl-child education because those with post-secondary education showed higher disposition than those with lower education. Thus, the higher the educational qualification of religious leaders, the more positive attitude they show towards girl-child education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are as follows.

- Counsellors and other policy makers in the education sector should endeavour to reinforce the already existing positive attitude of religious leaders by actively

involving them in the campaigns on girl-child education.

- Since religious leaders showed positive attitude, the campaigns on girl-child education should be peculiarly carried out at religious centres in order to convince adherents of Christianity and Islam on its importance. It would be easier since religious leaders have positive disposition to the issue.
- Since Christian religious leaders showed more positive attitude than Muslim, enlightenment campaigns on importance of girl-child education should be intensified among the latter in order to improve their attitude.
- Special focus should be placed on religious leaders who have secondary education and below in order to sensitize them on the importance of girl-child education and improve their attitude towards the issue.
- As a matter of policy, government should mandate religious leaders to always talk about importance of girl-child education when preaching in worship places.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that religious leaders in Ilorin metropolis have positive attitude towards girl-child education. Furthermore, religious leaders did not feel girl-child education will promote premarital sex, late marriage and negative religious doctrines. Christian religious leaders showed more positive attitude towards girl-child education. Religious leaders with post-secondary education are more positive in their attitude towards girl-child education than those with lower educational qualification.

The findings of this study have implications for the counselling profession in particular and other groups in the society. Counselling is a helping profession which cuts across every human endeavour and thus its influence is expected to touch various spheres of life. Counselling should increase knowledge of religious leaders on the importance of girl-child education in order to increase their positive disposition towards the phenomenon. In addition, special attention is required on the training of religious leaders with counselling skills so that they can be involved in the campaigns on girl-child education. Thus, the finding of this study could serve as an eye-opener to counsellors to know their responsibilities in lifting the bar beyond educational institutions but to also extend to cultural sphere. In general, it is clear from the findings of this study that religious leaders, if adequately sensitized, could champion the effort to improve girl child enrolment in schools.

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