



IMPACT OF SOCIOECONOMICS ON LOW ACCESS TO BASIC EDUCATION AMONG GIRLS IN BALI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract:

The best asset for developing any society lies on investing 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 factors influencing low access of the girl-child to free primary education in Nigeria with a focus on Bali Local Government Area (LGA). The researcher used a cross sectional survey design. An interview schedule and questionnaire were used to collect data depending on the educational attainment of respondents. Qualitative and quantitative data collected were 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 socioeconomic and cultural factors have an influence in inhibiting the girl child's access to basic education in Bali LGA. It was captured that over three fifths (66%) of the participants reported that child labour was prevalent in the study area. However, the finding was a reflection of the economic living standards of the households in Bali LGA, where girls were used to support income generation for the households. It emerged during the study also that child labour was necessitated by the economic hardships of the parents, drawing its root from poverty, which drives the girls to supplement and boost family income. High (60%) rates of early marriages were also reported in this study. The researcher recommends that the government of Nigeria should introduce new innovative initiatives to control child labour and enforce anti child labour laws, together with innovative approaches to mitigate early marriages.

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1. 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. (Glennnerster *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 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) posits that literacy rate for Nigerian girls and women stood at 47%, with male placed at 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. Indeed, it is a subject that has persisted for decades now with positive milestones happening albeit slowly.

Article 26 of the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) had identified access to education 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 have been reconsiderations and reflections on commitments and obligations to the young and the marginalized in embracing education. Evidently, there exists significant discrimination on girl-child education in some countries. In Afghanistan, for instance, girls are simply barred from school under the Taliban regime (Alabi *et al.*, 2014), while in Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram, which means *"western education is forbidden"* has similar consequences. In fact, the insurgency had brought a fatal blow on the enrolment of pupils and students,

especially girls in Northeast Nigeria. Precisely, 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, . (ibid). The constant threat posed by Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, which started in 2009 and other extremists' religious sect like the Jama'atu Anbarul Mmuslimma, FinBadilas Sudan, undermines efforts at improving education in Northeast Nigeria. Ruquyyatu, (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. The duo, confirm this notion when they allude that it has always been like that and that the perception continue to persist. 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. Further, Ogundipe (2007) 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 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 (Nkosha, *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, to Goodluck (2011) in Tyoakaa *et al.* (2014), 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 this regard, even with the introduction of free primary education, access to education has remained a pipe dream to many Nigerian and by extension Kenyan children as well, which has also introduced free basic education. While free primary education in the country accounted for an increase in enrolment, a sizeable number of children (especially girls), still find themselves out of school. Ndawa, (2014). This is caused by demand for household laborers and child miners; child pregnancies, child marriages, while nursing of the sick at home took the highest number (Togunde and Cater, 2008). In Ethiopia, for example, under eight year old girls are sometimes abducted for marriage (Offorma, 2009). In South Africa, a report by Human Rights Watch (2016) warned that sexual violence and abuse hampered girls' access to education. In most West African countries, girls are recruited from poor and rural families to work as domestic servants in the coastal cities or even neighboring countries (Offorma, 2009). In the work of Alabi and Alabi (2012), it is described that girl-child education in Nigeria is a forgotten resource. According to this realization, the Nigerian government has invested considerable amount of finances, 369 Billion Naira in the 2016/2017 budget in the call for free education for all (FGN, 2016 Budget). The government has also put in place many interventions and programmes designed to enhance educational access in formal basic education. Indeed, since independence, Nigeria has generally made big strides in providing education for her citizenry; the number of primary schools has increased fifteen folds, while enrolment has increased twenty folds, higher than in the 1960s where the enrolment in 2000 was 19,151,438 pupils and in 2014, the number of enrolled pupils increased to 23,129,927 (UNESCO, 2014).

In spite of this 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). Murkhtar et al., (2011) in Tyoakaa *et al.*, (2014) identified religious misinterpretation, cultural practice, poverty, early marriage, illiteracy, inadequate school infrastructure as some of the factors militating against girl-child education. This is because formal female education in the Northern States is accorded less value. It is recorded that Nigeria is, indeed, among those West African countries which has the highest number of children who are out of school; more than 75% of those reported to be out of school are girls (UNICEF, 2007).

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, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other 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).

2. Statement of the problem

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 girls, even under the free primary education in Nigeria remains problematic. According to Goodluck (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 is a socioeconomic question or variable involving costs of 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 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?

3. Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to find out the factors influencing low access of the girl-child to free primary education in Bali LGA of Nigeria. The study was guided by the objective to identify Socioeconomic and cultural factors influencing access of the girl-child to free primary education in Bali LGA in Taraba State of Nigeria.

3.1. Theoretical framework

The study used the Pearson's Gender Relations Theory developed in 1995 by Pearson, (1995). According to this theory, society views all social activities as taking place on the basis of social roles and interactions between men and women. History shows that such an assignment of social roles has generally been characterized by gender biases against women.

Pearson's gender relations theory is appropriate for this study because it provides an interpretational framework on the basis of which various social, cultural and economic norms and standards may be used to assign women opportunities of access to social activities such as the education of girls. Arguably, the cultural and socio-economic norms described in the theory tend to suggest how some of the fundamental factors which hinder girl-child access to free primary education in Nigeria may be identified and isolated, underscoring its relevance in this research.

Further, the theory was relevant for this study because it captured well the interpretation of how socio-economic and cultural factors have influenced access of the girl child to free primary education in Nigeria. It attempts to explain how in the traditional set-up, for example, the head of family was always assigned to the male parent. The patriarchal ideology was and to some extent is dominant in Africa (Igube, 2004 and 2010). To Walby (1990), these patriarchal structures have always put restrictions on girl-child access to educational opportunities. Indeed, Walby and Igube (Ibid.) identified two distinctive forms of patriarchy, namely private and public. Private patriarchy is often the kind of patriarchy where the domination of women and the girl-child occurred within the household. Here, the girls are often socialized to believe that they cannot take independent decisions. Whereas public patriarchy is a more inclusive type and captures many aspects in society, where girls are excluded more compared to their male counterparts. Accordingly, looking at the Nigerian case through the lenses of this theory; it was instructive to note that state policies and priorities always tend to be biased toward patriarchal interests.

4. Methodology

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 an 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 - The population size = 31,343

Z - The critical value = 1.96

p - The expected response proportion = 0.5

e - Margin of error = 5%

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

n=379

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

Table 1: Target population sampling frame 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).

4.1. Research instruments

The study utilized a combination of questionnaires and interview schedules for 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 objectives of the study.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Socioeconomic contribution of child labour and education access for girls

Socioeconomic factors influence how a particular group of people or class behaves. The socioeconomics of a family are lifestyle components, measured on social standing or financial viability respectively. In fact, socioeconomics of society influences social privileges and level of financial dependence, which affects quality of life.

Child labour was considered as one of the socioeconomic factors that impede girl child access to basic education in Bali LGA. It is clear from the field that child labour contributes to the wellbeing of the family. The variable child labour was envisaged to mean the use of girls as agents of generating income for the family. This variable was incorporated in this study, so as to help unveil the economic living standard of the households and its implication on the girl child access to basic education in Bali LGA. Figure 1, presents the results of the study on the contribution of child labour to the economic wellbeing of the family.

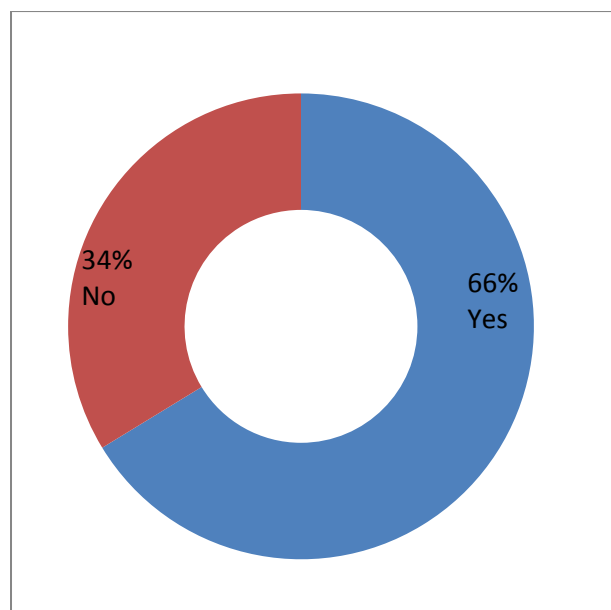


Figure 1: Child labour and economic wellbeing of the family

Figure 1 shows that over three fifths (66%) of the respondents had agreed that their girls contribute to the economic well-being of their families, while over one third (34%) disagreed. The finding on the contribution of child labour with over three fifth (66%) to the economy of the family has implications for the girl child's school attendance. However, this finding was not a surprise as girls' involvement in the economy of the households in Bali LGA is a mirror of Northern Nigeria, where most of the households are poor and hence likely to entertain any income to support the family

regardless of the source. In Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality that is depicted in lack of food, clothes, education and other basic amenities (Ucha, 2010). Northern Nigeria in particular has the highest figure of relative poverty in comparison with Southwest and Southeast zones that have higher figures of 76.3% and 77.7% relative poverty respectively. National Bureau of Statistics Report (NBS, 2012). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2007) in Medugu (2017) reports that “*despite Nigerians plentiful resources and oil wealth, poverty is widespread to the extent that the country is ranked one of the poorest countries in the world*”. Indeed, over 70% of the population is classified as poor, with 35% living in absolute poverty. (Andenrele 2012). The finding concurs with that of Aliyu (2006) in Agbo (2017), who contended that child labour in Nigeria is due to poverty levels in the families. Thus, children from poor households, especially girls are compelled to contribute to family income. Indeed, girls were observed during the study helping their mothers in hawking food stuff and attending to domestic chores.

5.2 Age at which girls start working in Bali LGA

Age of girls when they start working was conceived to provide more insight on the variable child labour as it locates the lowest and possible highest age of involvement into the vice. This variable was considered critical in this study because it would reveal the age at which these girls are engaged in child labor in Bali LGA, and the implication it has on access to primary education. Figure 2, presents the results for the age of girls when they start exploiting their labour for pay.

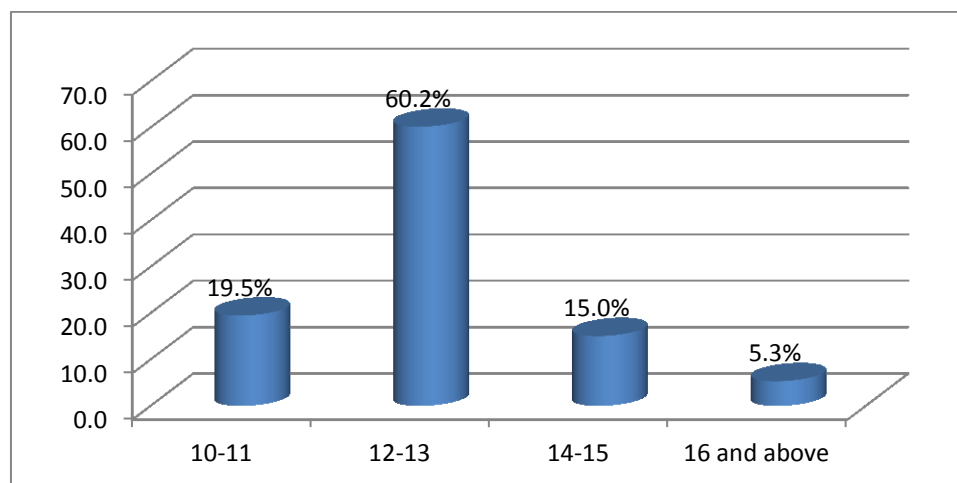


Figure 2: Age at which girls start working

It is clear in Figure 2 that three fifths (60%) of the respondents reported that their girls started working at the age of 12-13 years, while far less than one tenth (5%) were of the view that their girls start working at age 16 years and above. From the findings it is evident that an overwhelming majority (95%) of the girls start working when they were 15 years and below. Further, during the survey we were informed that children, especially girls are being used at a tender age to support family income, with boys being sent to school from the income accrued from these girls using their labour. The

discrimination of girls over boys in accessing education can be explained by the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, where girls are considered inferior. (Okoli, 2007). This actually deprives their potential, dignity and this is harmful to their mental and social development. (ILO, 2010). What is critical for this study is the implication this has on girl-child's access to basic education. In fact, the study affirms that of Ibrahim et al., (2018), who pointed out that in 2016, an estimated 150 Million children, especially girls under the age of 14 years engaged in child labour worldwide with most of them working under circumstances that denies them their playful childhood, and jeopardize their education and health. Most working children were reported to be 11- 14 years, but around 60 Million were aged between 5- 11 years (ibid).

5.3 Number of hour's girls work per day

To find the extent of the problem of lack of access for the girl child due to child labour, we found out the number of hours daughters work a day as labourers in generating income for the family. The thinking is that the number of hours spent at work may probably interfere with schooling programme. Figure 3, presents the study findings.

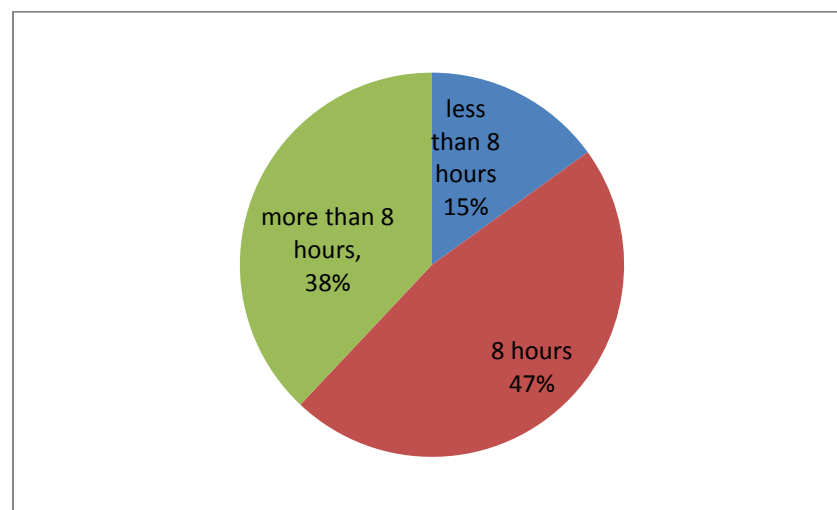


Figure 3: Hours girls worked per day

In Figure 3, it is depicted that over four fifths (85%) of the respondents said that girls worked for 8 hours or more per day, while less than one fifths (15%) of the respondents worked for less than 8 hours . The finding with over four fifths (85%) who reported that girls work for 8 hours or more, means that those girls don't attend school. This finding supports the work of Akinyi and Musani, (2016), who revealed that poor rural parents responded by sending their children, especially the girls into the domestic market in exchange for regular cash and food, spending hours working.

5.4 Compensation for services

This variable was included to give more insights on the variable child labour. The idea was to find out the compensation for child labour. This variable is important because there is possibility for the girls to keep working forever or for long hours to depending

on the level of compensation they receive. Findings on this variable may probably help to explain the extent to which child labour may likely have implications on access to basic education in Bali LGA. Figure 4 contain the results of the study.

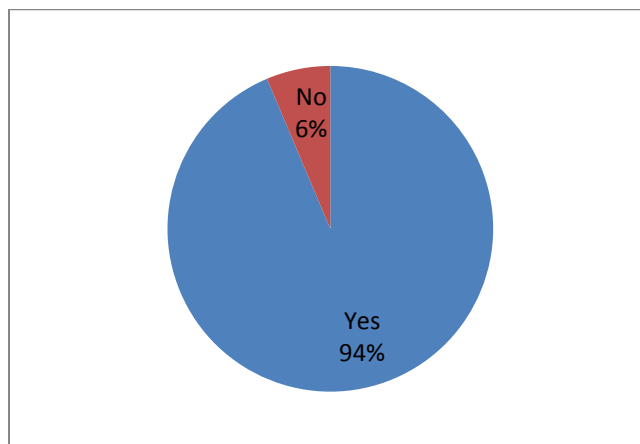


Figure 4: Compensation for child labour

Figure 4 depicts that most (94%) of the respondents affirming that girls get compensated for their service. The finding has implication on access to education as the girls' sale their labour power instead of attending classes. This finding corroborates that of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCR, 2004) when it was observed that girl child educational opportunity is hampered by child labour in most households, many girls are employed as house girls and child menders in urban and rural areas to be paid in exchanged for their services at the expense of their education.

5.5 Ways of compensation for the child services

This variable ways was used to mean mechanisms that are employed to pay for the girl's services by employers. Important to note is that the ways they are compensated may also contribute to low access to primary education. The study findings are presented in Figure 5.

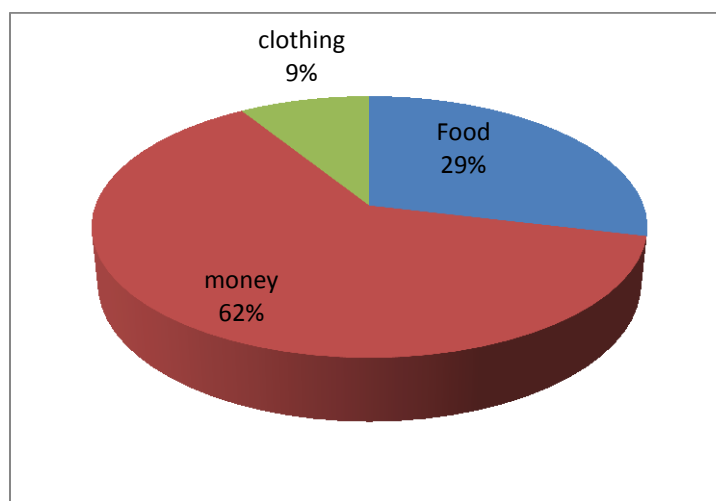


Figure 5: Ways of compensation for child services

Figure 5 reveals that over three fifths (62%) of the respondents said that girls are compensated in form of money, while over one third (38%) mentioned clothing and food respectively. The higher (62%) percentage of the respondents citing money as a form of compensation means that the girl's pay directly may be used to support their access to education by meeting the costs of schooling. More so, access to money is important for a school going child, because of its versatility in meeting other educational needs, including food. The finding is coherent with that of Griffin, (2015), who reported that poor parents tend to give preference to essential needs such as food, shelter and clothing, education is placed at a distance though it is one of the critical basic needs. This explains probably the high percent (62%) of respondents reporting money as a form of compensation for the use of child labour by employers, which is used to obtain these basic needs.

6. Cultural factors

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-Oatey, 2012). Bali LGA is a rural set up that subscribes to traditional and cultural ways of life. The study hoped to unearth cultural practices that influence 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 influence on low access to basic education for girls.

One of the cultural factors considered was early marriages, especially its implication of girl's access to education. The variable early marriage was conceived to mean marital union entered by the agreement of guardians or parents for underage girls. This variable was visaged to be important in this study because of its implication to accessing education for girls. Figure 6, presents the results of the study.

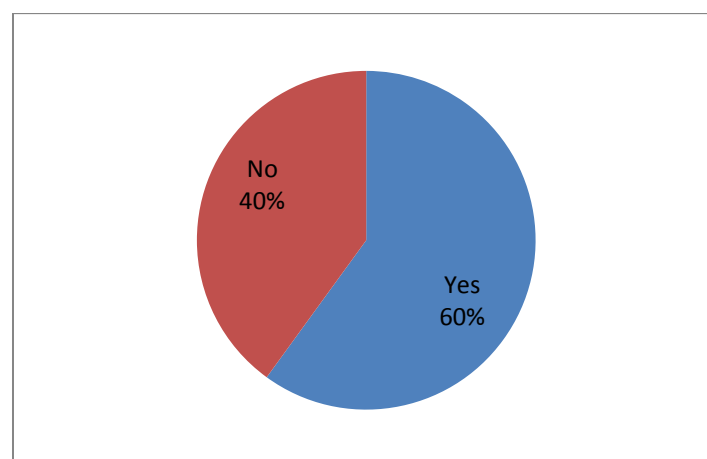


Figure 6: Daughter married early

Figure 6 depicts that three fifths (60%) of the respondents agreed to the fact that their daughters were married early, while two fifth (40%) disagreed marrying their daughters early. The finding that three fifths (60%) of the respondents are of the view that their daughters were married early has implications on access to basic education. This could be as a result of Islamic and traditional religious beliefs in the northern region, where most Muslim parents, preferred to marry off their daughters for fear that western education may promote values and behavior which are contrary to their cultural norms to their girls. This finding is in line with Osinulu (1994), who contended that the girl child is discriminated against in terms of access to basic education and married off early, thereby denying the girl child required competence for community and national development.

6.1 Age at marriage for the girls

Age at marriage as a variable was conceived to mean the number of years at which girls were being married. This variable was considered critical in this study because, the age at which girls are being married has implications on accessing education. According to Section 31 of the Nigerian Child Rights Act 2003, it is stipulated that the age of consent for marriage is 18 years. Figure 7 captures the findings of the study.

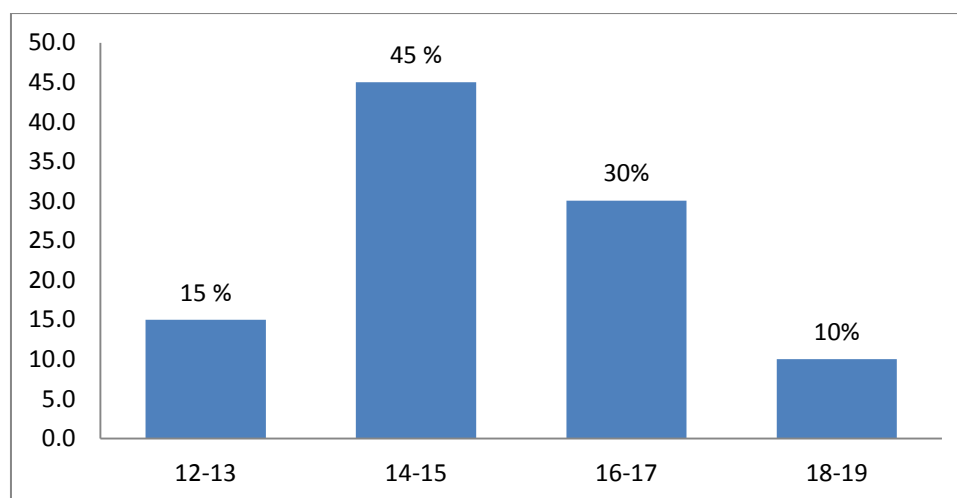


Figure 7: Age at marriage for girls

Findings in Figure 7, show that over two fifths (45%) of the respondents had married off their daughters at the age of 14-15 years, one third (30%) of the respondents at 16-17, while the lowest age at marriage for the girls was reported at between 12-13 years. The study findings are clear that three quarters (75%) of the respondents agreed to marry their daughters at below 18 years contrary to the Nigerian Child Rights Act 2003, with only one tenth doing it at age 18-19 years. This result has serious implication on access for the girl child to free primary education in the study area, as these girls are married at the age at which they are meant to be in school. In consistency with the finding of this study, Adekola, *et. al*, (2015), who also carried out a study in Northeast Nigeria found that girl child marriage has made it sour for brides, as most girls are

forced into early marriages in their mid-teens; thereby aborting beautiful and achievable life goals, and future ambitions for girls. These findings are also echoed by Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN Africa, 2008), who observed that in Northern Nigeria, 12 million girls around the age of 13-14 years are married in the region.

The study probed to establish whether parents think they are justified in marrying their girls early at the expense of their education. Findings of the study are carried in Figure 8.

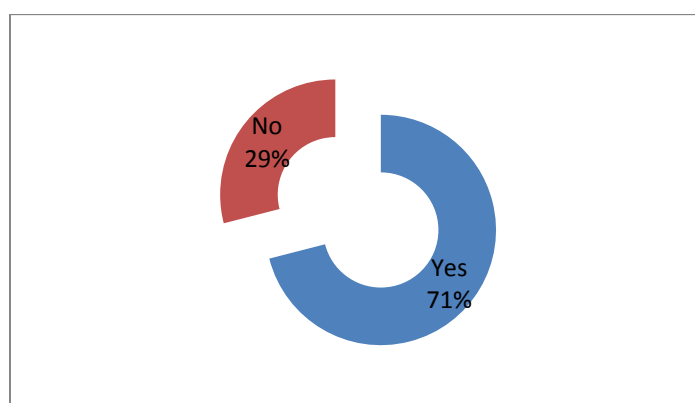


Figure 8: Justification of early marriages

Figure 8 shows that over three fifths (71%) of the respondents said that they are justified marrying their daughters early, while over one quarter (29%) reported that they are not justified. The finding on high (71%) percentage of parents saying they are justified is consistent with that of Nwakego (2014), who observed that the girl child in Northern Nigeria is made to believe that as a woman the kitchen is her place, boys are generally preferred to be educated than girls. Evidently, some of the parents had these to say:

"...society view the girl child as meant for marriage to bear children and attain motherhood status" (Interview with head of a household). Field work 2017

"...according to traditional beliefs in this area, girls are married early to minimize the chances of becoming pregnant in their fathers homes.....many parents prefer marrying their daughters while virgin so that they may not become a disgrace to their family" Interview with head of a household). Field work 2017

"...In the case of an extended or polygamous family with many children.....this makes the daughters to be given out for marriage for they are considered a burden for the parents to provide for all the children" (head of household). Field work 2017

From all these excerpts, it is clear that the girl child is not given her rightful space in accessing educational opportunities and attaining her life dreams. The exclusion of

the girl child is evident as members of the community feel justified to marry their daughters early at the expense of their education.

It was further apparent when it was stated in one of the interviews that:

"...circumstances actually forced us to marry our daughter early because there was no money to keep her in school and take care of her school needs....the economic conditions of the family were not favorable....we used the dowry paid to cater for family needs and educated other children in the family" . Field work 2017.

When a family is living in poverty, it becomes hard to provide for basic needs of the family members and the only option left may be to use unorthodox means including marrying daughters early in exchange for cash or dowry. Thus, hard economic conditions press parents to marry their daughters to whom it is ready to pay for the dowry.

Religion, especially Islam and traditional beliefs are usually associated with low formal access to primary education for the girl-child. (Otieng, 2014). In other instances, early marriages for girls are associated with the enhancement of family ties. Parents marry their girls at the young age to foster the relationships and links with other families. Such linkages are considered part of social capital that can come in handy when the family is in distress.

7. Conclusion

Embedded in socioeconomic and cultural factors are obstacles that have been standing against the girl child access to primary education in Bali LGA Taraba State, Nigeria. The study concludes that child labour is mainly necessitated by economic compulsion of the parents, drawing its basis from poverty which drives the girl child to supplement and boost family income. It emerges from the findings of the study that many of these girls miss out of their right to education as a result. Early marriage on the other hand still thrives in spite of various conventions against the practice. While early marriages were rampant, they were most likely to occur among poor households with a strong sense of cultural and religious belief system.

7.1 Recommendations

Education is a very crucial component of human development. Girls who are drawn to child labour and early marriages are basically driven to these vices due to economic deprivation, culture and religious convictions. Accordingly, attempts should be made to enhance households' socioeconomic empowerment. Parents, especially women should be given opportunities for income generating activities by both Non-Governmental Organization and government agencies. Government should introduce new initiatives to control child labour and enforce anti-child laws. Practically, the Nigerian government

should create girl child centred education sensitivity awareness programmes at the Federal, State and Local levels.

Legislations concerning child labour may not be adequate but proper implementation of the existing laws should be put to serious consideration. One of the serious gaps in using children for labour is the laxity and non-compliance to national and international labour laws in many countries including Nigeria. There is therefore urgent need to comply with the rule of law and ensure that girls stay in school like their male counterparts.

In order to stem the tide of early marriages for girls and mitigate its resultant effects, education of the girl child must take prominence among the residents of Bali LGA. Improving access to education and eliminating gender preference in education are important strategies in mitigating early marriages.

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