

Achieving Gender Equality in Basic Schools in Rivers State: Implications for Sustainable Development Goals

Enoch, Veronica Akpan
ronienoch02@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper focused on achieving gender equality in basic schools in Rivers State: implication for sustainable development. The research was guided by four specific objectives and four research questions, as it adopted the descriptive design. The population for the study comprised of 304003 pupils from all public and private primary as well as 163358 students from all junior secondary schools spread across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Numbering 2703 (primary) and 1034 (junior secondary schools), the entire population of 467361 learners was equally used as the sample size, since it was a document analysis. The instrument for data collection were the documents collected from UBEC based on their national survey 2018 which was duly validated by the experts in the field of educational management. The research questions were answered using simple ratios. The findings of the study revealed that more female children than male were enrolled in basic schools in Rivers State, with the highest enrollment in the urban areas. Unlike the national figure, the gender parity index for the state was slightly above 1.00 in both public and private basic schools. The study concluded that though enrollment of children into basic schools in Rivers State did not meet the projected figure, gender parity was achieved between male and female learners enrolled into basic schools therefore making the attainment of SDG 4 and 5 feasible. It was recommended among others that the government and all other stakeholders should work towards ensuring that the gap between out of school children of basic school age and those enrolled in schools is reduced and retention within the formal school system maintained.

Keywords: Basic, gender, access, development, goals.

Introduction

Basic education covers all educational activities designed for both male and female to first and foremost acquire necessary knowledge and skills to survive. Basic education was established to help individuals to develop to their full capacities. It sets out to train them on how to live and work in dignity. Attaining basic education makes every single individual that has gone through it, irrespective of sex, to be capable of participating fully in their personal and communal development. This inadvertently results in the improvement in the quality of their lives. Besides, the individual is left in a better position to make informed decisions and of course ensure continual lifetime learning. The above tenets are reflected in various international documents. This include the 1990 Jomtien conference World Declaration on Education for All (EFA); of which Nigeria is a signatory to, also Dakar EFA forum of 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which later translated into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) currently pursued world-wide, with target year being 2030.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was first launched in Sokoto on 30th September 1999 by the then President Olusegun Obasanjo. But it became operational the next year's January, 2000. As enshrined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014),

children between the ages of 0-15 years are the beneficiaries of basic education in Nigeria. UBE programme makes provision for the Nigerian child to obtain compulsory Early Childhood Care and Development Education (ECCDE), pre-primary, primary as well as junior secondary school level of education free of charge. To achieve the above, enabling laws were put in place such as the Child Right Act of 2003, the UBE and other related matters Act of 2004 as well as Rivers State UBE law No. 6 of 2005.

UBE laws work in conjunction with the Child Right Act. It is imperative to note that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) 2001 ratification of the United Nations (UN) Child Rights convention enabled the National Assembly to put into place the 2003 Child Right Act. Rivers State was among the earliest States to adopt the 2003 Child Right Act. The Act stipulates that every child in Nigeria is entitled to free, compulsory, primary and junior secondary schooling irrespective of gender, tribe or socio-economic status. And as such no Nigerian child of school age should be out of school. By implication, it entails hundred percent enrollment rate, all things being equal. In April 2004, the UBE and other related matters Act was promulgated but the Act was passed into law by the National Assembly on the 26th of May, 2004. Section 15(1) of the 2004 Act clearly stipulates that the following are free: tuition, books, instructional materials, furniture and lunch. The Rivers State UBE law No. 6 of 2005 assents to the provision in the national Act stated above. At the national level the setting up of the UBE Act was closely followed by the setting up of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) on 7th of October, 2004. UBEC mission focuses on creating, widening, deepening, access and removal of all barriers that could stop the citizens from receiving quality basic education in the country. This resonates positively with the sustainable development goals, most especially goals 4 and 5. Goal 4 focuses on providing quality and equitable education with particular focus on eliminating gender disparities and ensuring equal access to all levels of education. While goal 5 clearly deals with gender equality and empowerment in all strata of societal life.

Ensuring that the girl child is educated is a reverberating theme in the SDG4 as well as SDG5. This study focussed on determining the rate of male and female learners in both public and private basic schools. In addition, it also set out to establish the fact whether each locality in the State had been able to reduce gender disparity. So, the determination of the gender parity of children in public and private basic schools in Rivers State formed a crucial part of confirming their access to education. These invariably would influence sustainable development goals delivery.

Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a group of global call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. It was adopted by United Nations in 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs). There are 17 goals in all and broken down to 169 targets. The 17 SDGs are inter-linked in that action taken in one area has the ability to affect outcome in other areas. The purpose is to offer development in such a way that a balance in sustainability is achieved socially, economically and environmentally. The goals are specifically enumerated as follows: 1) No poverty; 2) Zero hunger; 3) Good health and wellbeing; 4) Quality education; 5) Gender

equality; 6) Clean water and sanitation; 7) Affordable and clean energy; 8) Decent work and economic growth; 9) Industry, innovation and infrastructure, 10) Reduced inequalities; 11) Sustainable cities and communities; 12) Responsible consumption and production; 13) Climate action; 14) Life below water; 15) Life on land 16) Peace, justice and strong institutions and 17) Partnerships for the Goals. Particular emphasis is placed on not just on ending poverty and reducing hunger but on ensuring that there is equality among the sexes especially encouraging the education of the girl child and reducing all forms of discrimination against the female gender.

Among the goals, SDG4 has been singled out and tagged as the ‘education goal’. SDG 4 aimed at ensuring the delivery of inclusive and equitable quality education with the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for every person as the secondary focus. Attainment of these 17 goals is said to be entrenched in the bedrock of quality education as encapsulated by SDG4. Since sustainable development takes into consideration the well-being of not just the present inhabitants of the earth but future generation, then gender equity must be established and all forms of inequalities in every facet of life eliminated, starting from the education arena. SDG 4 has 10 targets of which ensuring that every male and female have access to quality education more especially at the basic school level where it should be universal, free and compulsory, is a key focal point. Secondly, eliminating every form of gender disparity which in turn is in sync with SDG 5 which focal point is on removal of gender inequality and empowering the female gender.

Access to Basic Education

Access to education is generally described as equality of educational opportunities. It is meant to be both quantitative and qualitative. Obanya (2010) stated that access to basic schooling should encompass entrance into school via enrolment, without subsequent irregularity in attendance, with unhampered grade progression at the right ages, easy movement into junior secondary from primary schools, meaningful learning which can be applied currently and later on in life. It represents equal opportunities given to children of different sex as well as social and economic classes to attend school. Kpee and Ajah (2017:58) postulated that “access to education implies making education available first and then creating avenues of making the citizenry available to the education made available by the government.” The Glossary of Education Reform (2014) sums access to education up as "how educational institutions and policies ensure -or at least strive to ensure – that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education". This by interpretation mean both male and female learners have equal rights.

Attaining gender parity in Basic Schools in Rivers State

All countries worldwide, through the SDG4, have been made to commit to the attainment of gender parity in education, widen and deepen access, build as well as upgrade educational facilities that are child friendly, disability and gender sensitive. Emphasis on education and gender equality has been at the forefront of EFA, MDGs and currently SDGs declaration. Gender equality is achieved when equity is established among the sexes.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to both women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures have to be in place to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that has been a barrier to the gender at a disadvantage, and stopping such from operating on a level playing ground. Okeke (2011) posited that the application of the principles of justice, fairness, between males and females in terms of assigned responsibilities, access to and control of resources in all areas of life entails gender equity. Gender inequity is not a new story in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It has been part and parcel of our societal arrangement from time immemorial. When the focus is on the formal education sector, the female gender had always borne the brunt of poor education in the past. Rahji (2009) reported that even as at 2009, there was still that preference for boys over girls in primary school enrollment especially by rural households in the western part of Nigeria. A 20 % gap between the male and female gender was observed which centres on biases in favour of the male child. This preference, reduced access and invariable enrollment rate of girls as compared to boys. Fasehun (2011) had maintained that even up till 2011 a boy child was always preferred to a girl and from childhood reinforcement given to the boy-child was always different from that given to the girl-child. He highlighted the fact illiteracy was higher amongst women than men when taking into consideration the enrollment figure of females in schools. Okeke (2011) stated that female education was placed at a secondary factor to that of male until recent outcry against female discrimination. Fasehun (2011) further laid emphasis on Olaluwoye's (2008) claim that in Africa women lagged behind in education, hence the need to address gender equity in our school system.

Baluch and Shahid (2009) also, in a closely related finding in Pakistan found that in spite of the multi-dimensional initiatives and policies that were geared towards closing enrolment gender gap at primary school level, there was still 11.13% marginal difference as at then. This gender gap was still, however, adduced to preference to males over females at school level, with underlying cultural, societal, and traditional inclinations. In Pakistan females were expected to be housewives whose primary duty was focused on taking care of their husbands, but the males became heir-apparent to the family name and properties as well as taking care of their parents, Baruch added further. The situation was not much different as observed in various communities in Nigeria. On many occasions as Okeke quoted Kalu and Amini-Philips (2009), some (female children) were forced into early marriage to raise funds which enabled parents educate their male counterparts. Ndlovu (2020) maintained that though there have been changes in the legislatures across African countries, traditional gender roles have not changed. Thus, establishing gender equity would invariably leads to gender equality.

Gender equality refers to a situation in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender. It involve value judgments and argues for policy changes. Such that, evidences of unequal educational opportunity against the female gender dotting the landscape must be addressed. Of such report include, Oladele (2018) that World Bank in 2014 stated that approximately 29% of boys of primary school age were out of school compared to 35% of girls of the same age. While almost 28% of female youth of secondary school age were out of school compared to 24% of male youth of the same age. Other studies have revealed that, approximately 60% of the 72 million elementary school-aged children who don't attend school, are females and that girls are 4% less unlikely to complete their basic school

education according to Adepoju, et al., (2020). Aja-Okorie in Adepoju et al. (2020) further opined that to achieve Goal 5 of the Education for All agenda, then the concept of gender equality in education should be considered as both males and females having equal opportunities and autonomy to participate in all levels of education without any social, stereotypes-roles, political, economic or cultural biases. What does it imply to have equal educational opportunity? It means every female child should have equal entitlements as the male child, thus ensuring equity which leads to equality. Gender equality encapsulates parity. Gender parity is a descriptive measure only. Gender parity in education is calculated by dividing the number of female learners at a given level of education by the number of male learners at the same level. The resulting value is referred to as Gender Parity Index (GPI).

Gender Parity Index (GPI) is an indicator of the extent of gender balance used to determine the degree to which the number of boys and girls as a ratio have access to basic education. A GPI of 1.00 reflects gender balance in enrollment. While a GPI less than 1, indicates that more boys than girls are enrolled in schools, an index of more than 1.00 is an indication that there are more girls than boys. Existing data from UBEC indicated that Nigeria as a whole, has always recorded a gender parity index below 1.00. The country recorded a gender parity index nationally for public primary as follows: 0.83, 0.86 and 0.94 for 2006, 2010 and 2018 consecutively. Whereas, for private primary the figure rose from 0.92 in 2006 to 1.00 in 2010 then went down to 0.98 in 2018 in favour of boys. Though there were signs of improvement as the index moved closer to the acceptable level, more boys were enrolled in primary schools. It was noted that in certain parts of the country more girls than boys dropped out of school either to engage in early marriages or support their families economically. At the junior secondary school level, the GPI still indicated a gender disparity. Public JSS, recorded 0.82 in 2006, which dropped to 0.80 in 2010 and then went up by 16% in 2018 in favour of the boys. In private JSS, GPI rose from 0.83 in 2006 to 0.99 in 2010 to 1.01 in 2018, showing a slight increase in female participation in schools. The combined general trend when considering the gender parity index of learners across basic schools in 2006, 2010 and 2018 showed that the GPI increased from 0.87 to 0.99 between 2006 and 2018 with proportion in favour of boys nationally. The number of boys enrolled in schools continued to increase more than that of girls depicting a gender imbalance in enrollment (UBEC, 2019).

The UNESCO's (2015) EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) for International Day of the Girl Child, revealed that no one country in Sub-Saharan Africa had attained gender parity in both primary and secondary education. The report added that there were still only 92 girls: 100 boys in primary school in the region. From the nations sampled, it was reported that while the republic of Chad had the greatest inequity, with girls finding it difficult to remain in primary and lower secondary schools in Chad. On the other hand, about 70% of the poorest girls in Guinea and Niger, had never attended school compared to less than 20% of the richest boys. The following details could be appraised as far back as the year 2000 from UNESCO Report (2000). Nigeria had over 50 million illiterates. Out of these, 13.6 million illiterates were females between the ages of 15-29, 14.8 million women aged 30-59 and 1.6million women above 60 years constituted the 30 million figures. There is certainly an observable gender disparity lagging at each phase of the education system with the poorest girls remaining highly at stark disadvantaged.

Several related data demonstrate that gender parity at basic school enrolment stage have great ripple effects on other sectors of the nation. Akinbi, and Akinbi (2015) had posited that there are multiplier effects of girl child education, as majority of females who are enrolled in basic school education, eventually pursue professional careers, raised smaller and healthier families, with lower infant mortality rate. Most importantly and worthy of note is the fact that most of their children turn out to be better educated than children whose mothers were not educated at all! Another effect for instance is that because girls are denied access to education as compared to the boys, several governments including Nigeria in the sub-Sahara is reported to have lost approximately \$126 billion in GDP because women were unable to contribute to the digital economy (Ayodele, 2022). More so, Equal Access International (EAI) according to Ayodele (2022) reported that more than 50% of women in Northern Nigeria still do not have access to the internet. This is strongly correlated with prevailing cultural and gender norms practiced in this region, as more than 60 percent of girl-parents do not encourage them to access internet. Another aftermath effect of the existing basic school education gender disparity is that these girls turn out to be part of the 35 percent of the unemployed women out of the approximately 23 million jobless Nigerians (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Muhammad and Shariff (2017) in their research of primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan, reported that such continual gender inequality in school enrolment poses danger to overall access to quality education and has a direct bearing on national economic growth by lowering options of gender available for employment and the average quality of human capital. UNESCO (2015) reported that in Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea and Mali, which have very high gender disparities in education, less than 12% of secondary teachers were women and as such denying adolescent girls important role models.

If the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index in which Nigeria ranked 139th position out of 153 countries is considered, then that sums up the line of argument that educational gender parity has multifaceted effects on economic, health, political and leadership opportunities, (Ayodele, 2022). The lesser number of girls exposed to basic education the lower the rate of our development. These observations as elucidated would make it pretty difficult for Nigeria to attain the UNSDG Goals especially (SDG 4 and 5) which clear aim is to achieve gender equality for all by 2030.

Statement of the Problem

Worldwide attention is focussed on actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Beyond policies and laws establishing universal basic education, the implementation of UBE laudable objectives and overcoming the various challenges facing it within the school system is the dominant factor for attainment of sustainable development goals, most especially SDG 4 and SDG 5. But the worrisome nature of the problem of gender disparity internationally has to be dealt with, so as not to derail that dream. It has been noted that one of the challenges in basic education in Africa remains as the disproportionate balance in gender representations in school enrollment. In Nigeria, from the advent of UBE, there had been noticeable increase in school enrolment, the first step in access to education. Though, increase in formal school enrollment was observed, a lull and drop were noted at various times particularly in the primary schools from 2006 to 2010 (Humphrey & Crawford, 2014)

and this took its toll more on the female gender. It was also observed that there was no parity in gender enrollment, though a wide variation occurred across the various geo-political zones. The north-east and north-west demonstrated the lower outcomes in terms of gender disparity when considering enrollment (FRN-BESDA/World Bank, 2017). Rahji (2009), had discovered that the major reasons for this gap was linked more to beliefs, cultural and traditional norms of the people. Okeke (2011) further reiterated that according to Asodike (2009), statistics from Nigeria showed that 58% of teenage girls were uneducated. Okeke further quoted Hemmati and Gardiner, who stated that between 1970-1990, literacy disparity fell by half (54%-74%), out of the 880 million world illiterates then, two-third were females, with 60% of the 130 million children without access to education being female children.

Irigoyen (2017) also discovered that despite the increase in primary schools and junior secondary schools' enrollment since the year 2000, transition and completion rates stagnated below 70%. Junior secondary schools recorded 65%, a figure that was above the average for sub-Saharan Africa but was far below universal average. Yet gender disparity was a noticeable challenge at the junior secondary level in enrollment too. Since, specifically in Nigeria, after over two decades of universal basic education being in operation, equal gender access to education in reality is deemed to still remain a challenge. This necessitated this research paper on examining whether gender equality has been achieved in basic schools in Rivers State and its implication for sustainable development.

Purpose of the Study

In broad term, the study investigated comprehensively equality of access to basic education by the different genders in basic schools in Rivers State. Achieving gender parity in basic schools plays a crucial role in Rivers State attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the objectives of this study were as follows:

1. Determine the gender parity index of children in public primary schools Rivers State.
2. Determine the gender parity index of children in private primary schools in Rivers State.
3. Determine the gender parity index of children in public junior secondary schools Rivers State.
4. Determine the gender parity index of children in private junior secondary schools Rivers State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions stated below:

1. What is the gender parity index of children in public primary schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the gender parity index of children in private primary schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the gender parity index of children in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State?
4. What is the gender parity index of children in private junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Methodology

The design for this study was descriptive research design. It was adopted so as to accurately and systematically describe the characteristics of the population being studied, without any manipulation of the independent variable. The population of 467,361 learners for the study was restricted to two levels of basic schooling in Rivers State. Precisely, it covered all public and private primary schools as well as all public and private junior secondary schools. There were as follows; 304003 pupils from 961 public primary schools and 1742 private primary schools, as well as 163,358 students from 319 public junior secondary schools and 715 private junior secondary schools spread across the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. Since the research involved document analysis which covered the whole population found in both public and private basic schools, purposive sampling method was used. Data were gathered from documents on information on basic schools in Rivers State existing in Universal Basic Education Board Commission (UBEC) Abuja data bank. Analysis of the data was done. Simple ratios were applied in analyzing the collected data to generate results which were presented in tables.

Results

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question one: What is the gender parity index of children in public primary schools in Rivers State.

Table 1: Gender Parity Index of children in public primary schools in Rivers State

S/N	LGA	Public Primary Enrollment			GPI	Status
		Male	Female	(M+F)		
1	ABUA-ODUAL	2571	2431	5002	0.9455	Disparity
2	AHOADA-EAST	4222	4264	8486	1.0099	Parity
3	AHOADA-WEST	3268	2940	6208	0.8996	Disparity
4	AKUKU-TORU	1438	1266	2704	0.8804	Disparity
5	ANDONI	5373	5204	10577	0.9686	Disparity
6	ASARI-TORU	1362	1310	2672	0.9618	Disparity
7	BONNY	1955	2016	3971	1.0312	Parity
8	DEGEMA	1414	1320	2734	0.9335	Disparity
9	ELEME	2698	2947	5645	1.0923	Parity
10	EMUOHA	4910	5610	10520	1.1426	Parity
11	ETCHE	6493	6606	13099	1.0174	Parity
12	GOKANA	3614	3506	7120	0.9702	Disparity
13	IKWERRE	3820	4007	7827	1.0489	Parity
14	KHANA	6490	6603	13093	1.0174	Parity
15	OBIO-AKPOR	7894	8866	16760	1.1231	Parity
16	OGBA-EGBEMA-NDONI	6357	6129	12486	0.9641	Disparity
17	OGU-BOLO	811	757	1568	0.9334	Disparity
18	OKRIKA	2742	2607	5349	0.9507	Disparity
19	OMUMA	1237	1301	2538	1.0517	Parity
20	OPOBO-NKORO	1267	1242	2509	0.9803	Disparity
21	OYIGBO	2444	2537	4981	1.0380	Parity
22	PORT-HARCOURT	8136	8489	16625	1.0434	Parity
23	TAI	2660	2717	5377	1.0215	Parity
GRAND TOTAL		83176	84675	167851	1.0180	Parity

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis

Table 1 showed that more females were enrolled into the public primary schools than their male counterpart. 12 Local Government Areas had attained gender parity in public primary schools while the remaining 11 recorded gender disparity (this fell along the 0.9 grading and as such can easily meet the standard in the nearest future). Given the fact that GPI is said to be attained when an area hits the “1.0” figure index, the Rivers State GPI of 1.0180 for public primary schools was just slightly above the set standard of 1.0. This meant that there is gender parity between girls and boys enrolled into public primary schools in the State.

Research Question two: What is the gender parity index of children in private primary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: Gender Parity Index of children in private primary schools in Rivers State

S/N	LGA	Private Primary Enrolment			GPI	Status
		Male	Female	(M+F)		
1	ABUA-ODUAL	932	1006	1938	1.0794	Parity
2	AHOADA-EAST	2129	2287	4416	1.0742	Parity
3	AHOADA-WEST	1982	1935	3917	0.9763	Disparity
4	AKUKU-TORU	491	472	963	0.9613	Disparity
5	ANDONI	800	846	1646	1.0575	Parity
6	ASARI-TORU	436	422	858	0.9679	Disparity
7	BONNY	2687	2766	5453	1.0294	Parity
8	DEGEMA	533	509	1042	0.9549	Disparity
9	ELEME	4514	4673	9187	1.0352	Parity
10	EMUOHA	2099	2210	4309	1.0529	Parity
11	ETCHE	4747	5132	9879	1.0811	Parity
12	GOKANA	1537	1707	3244	1.1106	Parity
13	IKWERRE	4967	5249	10216	1.0568	Parity
14	KHANA	2426	2530	4956	1.0429	Parity
15	OBIO-AKPOR	11112	11175	22287	1.0057	Parity
16	OGBA-EGBEMA NDONI	2369	2258	4627	0.9532	Disparity
17	OGU-BOLO	317	301	618	0.9495	Disparity
18	OKRIKA	1502	1569	3071	1.0446	Parity
19	OMUMA	976	1000	1976	1.0244	Parity
20	OPOBO-NKORO	111	135	246	1.2162	Parity
21	OYIGBO	6022	6012	12034	0.9983	Disparity
22	PORT-HARCOURT	12812	12797	25609	0.9988	Disparity
23	TAI	1905	1755	3660	0.9212	Disparity
	GRAND TOTAL	67406	68746	136152	1.0199	Parity

Source: Researcher’s Data Analysis

It is shown in Table 2 that 14 Local Government Areas had attained gender parity in private primary schools while the remaining 9 LGAs had gender disparity. Given the fact that the State GPI index of 1.0199 for private primary schools is slightly higher than the 1 index, the difference between this and that of public primary schools (1.0180) is just 0.0019. The gender parity here is still slight. Thus, the gender disparity gap between male and females’ learners

in private schools in nine of the LGAs was quite minimal. It would be easy for the gap to be breached.

Research Question three: What is the gender parity index of children in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 3: Gender Parity Index of children in public junior secondary schools in Rivers State

S/N	LGA	Total Public JSS Enrollment			GPI	Status
		Male	Female	(M+F)		
1	ABUA-ODUAL	1400	1328	2728	0.9485	Disparity
2	AHOADA-EAST	2617	2487	5104	0.9503	Disparity
3	AHOADAWEST	1517	1522	3039	1.0033	Parity
4	AKUKU-TORU	449	522	971	1.1626	Parity
5	ANDONI	1423	1400	2823	0.9838	Disparity
6	ASARI-TORU	778	731	1509	0.9396	Disparity
7	BONNY	1092	982	2074	0.8993	Disparity
8	DEGEMA	768	654	1422	0.8516	Disparity
9	ELEME	1718	2147	3865	1.2497	Parity
10	EMUOHA	2598	2431	5029	0.9357	Disparity
11	ETCHE	2503	2278	4781	0.9101	Disparity
12	GOKANA	1754	2080	3834	1.1858	Parity
13	IKWERRE	2280	2371	4651	1.0399	Parity
14	KHANA	3597	3644	7241	1.0131	Parity
15	OBIO-AKPOR	11297	15811	27108	1.3996	Parity
16	OGBA-EGBEMA-NDONI	4232	4002	8234	0.9456	Disparity
17	OGU-BOLO	404	357	761	0.8836	Disparity
18	OKRIKA	1378	1496	2874	1.0856	Parity
19	OMUMA	618	800	1418	1.2945	Parity
20	OPOBO-NKORO	303	254	557	0.8383	Disparity
21	OYIGBO	1736	1727	3463	0.9948	Disparity
22	PORT-HARCOURT	7393	9205	16598	1.2451	Parity
23	TAI	892	943	1835	1.0572	Parity
	Grand Total	52747	59172	111919	1.1218	Parity

Source: Researcher’s Data Analysis

From all indication, Table 3 revealed that the State has a GPI of 1.1218 for public JSS. 11 LGAs had attained gender parity in public junior secondary schools while the remaining 12 LGAs recorded gender disparity. The data showed that more females enrolled into public junior secondary schools than their male counterpart. Given the fact that GPI is said to be attained when an area hits the “1.0” figure index, the Rivers State GPI index of 1.1218 for public junior secondary schools was just slightly above the set standard. The parity index here was slightly higher than what was obtained for public primary schools.

Research Question four: What is the gender parity index of children in private junior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 4: Gender Parity Index of children in private junior secondary schools in Rivers State

S/N	LGA	Total Private JSS Enrollment			GPI	Status
		Male	Female	(M+F)		
1	ABUA-ODUAL	46	56	102	1.2174	Parity
2	AHOADA-EAST	723	810	1533	1.1203	Parity
3	AHOADA-WEST	980	799	1779	0.8153	Disparity
4	AKUKU-TORU	223	192	415	0.8609	Disparity
5	ANDONI	214	230	444	1.0747	Parity
6	ASARI-TORU	13	14	27	1.0769	Parity
7	BONNY	919	989	1908	1.0760	Parity
8	DEGEMA	12	15	27	1.2500	Parity
9	ELEME	1493	1529	3022	1.0241	Parity
10	EMUOHA	861	885	1746	1.0278	Parity
11	ETCHE	1810	2070	3880	1.1436	Parity
12	GOKANA	78	53	131	0.6795	Disparity
13	IKWERRE	2794	3050	5844	1.0916	Parity
14	KHANA	757	763	1520	1.0079	Parity
15	OBIO-AKPOR	5166	5468	10634	1.0585	Parity
16	OGBA-EGBEMA-NDONI	1061	1059	2120	0.9981	Disparity
17	OGU-BOLO	12	8	20	0.6666	Disparity
18	OKRIKA	373	329	702	0.8820	Disparity
19	OMUMA	137	164	301	1.1970	Parity
20	OPOBO-NKORO	-	-	-	-	-
20	OYIGBO	2544	2545	5089	1.0004	Parity
21	PORT-HARCOURT	4594	5279	9873	1.1491	Parity
22	TAI	154	168	322	1.0909	Parity
	Grand Total	24964	26475	51439	1.0605	Parity

Source: Researcher's Data Analysis

NOTE: No Record for Opobo/Nkoro

Table 4 shows that the State had a GPI of 1.0605 for private JSS and this is quite low. 16 LGAs had attained gender parity in public junior secondary schools while the remaining 6 LGAs experienced gender disparity. It should be noted that no records existed for Opobo Nkoro. Since the gender parity index occurred in majority of the LGAs, the State summary is that there is parity between the male and female children in private junior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion

Firstly, the findings of the study revealed that Rivers State was one of the States that attained gender parity in basic schools. The Gender Parity Index ranged as follows: public primary (1.0180), private primary (1.0199), public junior secondary schools (1.1218) and private

junior secondary schools (1.0605). The gap between male and female in public and private basic schools, in LGAs that showed disparity can be breached. Private junior secondary schools had the highest GPI in Rivers State. Junior secondary schools fared better than primary schools.

Secondly, the results showed that Rivers State as a whole had a gender parity index of 1.02. This was commendable because all basic schools met the 1.0 index. The conclusion that was drawn here was that Rivers State had met the international standard of reducing gender disparity in both public and private basic schools. Girl child education is accepted and encouraged. But much still has to be done to move the GPI from low to high. Nigeria as a whole on the other hand, had a gender parity index of 0.92, indicating a gender disparity. Rahji (2009) report indicated that as far back as 2009, there was a preference for boys over girls in primary school enrollment especially by rural households in the western part of Nigeria. A 20% gap between the two genders was observed. Rahji (2009), also stated that the major reasons for this gap was linked more of cultural / traditional norms and beliefs of the people. The same experience noted by Rahji (2009) was applicable or observed in Pakistan according to Baluch and Shahid (2009). For Rivers State to have met the parity index, it meant that certain cultural barriers, traditional norms and beliefs were no more binding on the inhabitants of most communities in the State. Enlightenments and proper response by the parents, communities to UBE sensitized program over the years, could be said to be a contributory factor for attainment of gender parity index in Rivers State. Muhammad and Shariff (2017) had declared that continual gender inequality in school enrolment poses danger to overall access to quality education and has a direct bearing on national economic growth by lowering options of gender available for employment and the average quality of human capital.

If the gender parity gap can be further narrowed down by giving more girls access to education, McKinney report in Ayodele, (2022) predicts that the Nigerian gross domestic product would jump by more than 20% or \$229 billion by the last quarter of 2025.

Implication

Based on the findings of the study, the achievement of gender parity in enrollment when considering access of children to education in basic schools in Rivers State is rather startling, given that the expectations from 2006 Census projections was that there will be more males than females in the basic school age bracket. That apart, in the past and up to the present year, Nigeria gender parity index is yet to hit the 1.0 mark, implying that there still exists disparity as more boys than girls are enrolled in schools nationally. Therefore, it is quite a feat for Rivers State to record a gender parity index above 1.0, indicative of the fact that the “girl child education is highly encouraged”. Thus, the slogan ‘leave no one behind’ is working in Rivers State. The implication clearly is that with this attainment of gender parity in enrollment in basic education, Rivers State is well on the way to attaining SDG4 and SDG5 in the nearest future.

Conclusion

The girl child education is taken seriously in Rivers State. The traditional norms and cultural barriers of the past is giving way to a new era, where there is equal opportunity for both male and female children in terms access to basic education. Thus, the desire to build an egalitarian, sustainable developed society is feasible now and in the near future.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were generated:

1. Government and all other stakeholders should work towards ensuring that the gap between out of school children of basic school age and those enrolled in formal schools is reduced.
2. While SDG4 lays emphasis on encouraging the 'girl child education', it should be noted that the dwindling number of male children in both public and private institution calls for serious attention to be paid to male attrition. So, efforts in Rivers State should also be made by the government and all other stakeholders to encourage boys to enroll and stay in school, most especially those caught-up in cultism, militancy and insurgency.
3. Both the public and private basic schools should consolidate on their gender parity status by ensuring that they increase the index

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