

**EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: THE LOCATION OF PUBLIC  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON FEMALE STUDENTS'  
ATTITUDE TO SCHOOLING IN PORT HARCOURT TOWNSHIP**

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**Abstract**

*This study was carried out to determine the equality of educational opportunity with respect to the location of female public secondary schools in Port Harcourt township. The descriptive survey research design was used. The sample consists of eighty (80) respondents which involves 20 parents/guardians and sixty (60) female public secondary schools students. The results were interpreted using maps, percentages and chats, and showed that there is only one public secondary school accessed by female students in Port Harcourt township. Most of the female students have to attend school outside Port Harcourt Township covering a (to and fro) distance of over 27.1km daily. The study reveal that students' are usually fatigued and lose interest in learning after covering such long distances to school. Absenteeism is fast becoming a syndrome among female secondary school student in Port Harcourt township. The study suggested the location of two new female public secondary schools, and urge education planners and policy makers to come up with a policy on appropriate distances from residence for public secondary school location in the country.*

**Keywords:** Equality of Educational Opportunity, School Location, Female Students, Attitude

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**Introduction**

School is one of the social institutions that is responsible for the development and training of the mind and skills of man. Education is a fundamental human right, this was reaffirmed by the international community in its collective commitments made at the World Conference on Education for All at Jomtien (Thailand), in 1990 to the Education for All (EFA) agenda. Promoting and protecting the right to education and promoting equality and non-discrimination are clearly interrelated duties of governments in accordance with human right norms (Kishore, 2014).

As a result of this every country accords great emphasis on education both in terms of quality and access, Amannah, Okwelle, Wokocha, (2014). It is for this reason that the Nigerian Government has stated in her National Policy on Education that education is a right of every Nigerian irrespective of gender, social status, religion, ethnic background and any peculiar individual challenges (NPE,2008 ;10). More so, one of the goals of education in Nigeria is the provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system (NPE 2008; 11). Unfortunately this policy have not been effected in the study area It is against this background that the study was undertaken to determine the implication of this inequality of location of public secondary schools on the girl child in Port Harcourt township.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite the efforts made by government to achieve equality in educational opportunity, the female public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Township do not have adequate access to education. This is because the nearest accessible public secondary school for the girl child (apart from Government Secondary School, Harold Wilson Drive) is more than 11km away. The major problems that prompted this study are:

- i. Female Public Secondary School Students in Port Harcourt Township do not have equal educational opportunities.
- ii. The location of public secondary schools affect female students' attendance to school.



*Fig 1: Female public secondary school students at Lagos Bus stop awaiting vehicles to convey them to schools.*



*Fig 2: Female public secondary school students at Lagos Bus stop still awaiting vehicles to convey them to schools.*

### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine ways of equalizing educational opportunities in the location of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township. Therefore, the following objectives are raised.

- i. To find out whether there are adequate girl's schools in Port Harcourt Township to enhance female academic achievement
- ii. To determine whether difficulty in transportation of students from Port Harcourt Township affects their school attendance

iii. To find out if availability of fund affects students attendance

### **Significance of the study**

This study shall be of theoretical, methodological and practical importance to students, scholars and researchers of education. The study will identify the lack of educational opportunities in the study area. The result of this study will help to equalize educational opportunities in the location of public secondary schools.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is all the female Public Secondary School students living in Port Harcourt township.

### **Research Questions**

- i. Are there adequate girl's schools in Port Harcourt Township?
- ii. Are there difficulties in transportation of female public secondary school students from Port Harcourt Township to school?
- iii. Is the location of public secondary school affecting their school attendance
- iv. Does availability of fund affect female students' attendance to public secondary schools?

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Concept of Equality**

The Declaration of Rights of Man (1789) states that "men are born, and always continue to be free and equal in respect of their rights" (Godpower, 2015). Equality is the fact of being equal and having the same value. It means equal treatment of people irrespective of social or cultural differences (English Dictionary). According to Obanya (2009), equality implies equal chances, equal treatment and equal gains. Ofoha (2009) in Salawu (1995) emphasised that since all persons are born equal, they should be treated equally irrespective of their social status which is a reflection of egalitarianism.

#### **The Rights of the Child to Educational Opportunity**

The proclamation in article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to education is an inalienable human right of every child – boys and girls alike. It establishes the fundamental principles of universal access to education and ensuring equality of educational opportunities. The Convention reflects UNESCO's mission of instituting collaboration among nations to "advance the idea of equality of educational opportunities without regard to race, sex or any distinctions, economic or social." Under Article 4 of the Convention, the States Parties to this Convention undertake to formulate, develop and apply a national policy which, by methods appropriate to the circumstances and to national usage, will ensure the promotion of equality of educational opportunities Kishore, S. (2014).

The right of every child to education on the basis of equal opportunity is also established in article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Free and compulsory primary education is an inalienable right of every child, and a core obligation of States under international human rights treaties. Beyond primary education, the right to education also extends to secondary education as well as the progression towards higher education. Its enjoyment is subject to the criteria of merit or capacity, while respecting the fundamental principles of non-discrimination and equality. The obligations assumed by States under human rights treaties range from ensuring universal access to primary education to progressive access to secondary education and higher education on the basis of capacity. The right to education is not only recognized as an entitlement, but as a source of empowerment Kishore (2014).

#### **Equality of Educational Opportunity**

Equal educational opportunities means the availability, accessibility, affordability and favourable conditions for all members of the society irrespective of their social status or class to acquire education

(Ajere, 2006). In the same vein, Amaele (2003) citing Uruakpa and Okeke (1989:559) observed that equality of education means giving the same type of treatment to everybody without discrimination, regardless of disability, location or other forms of barriers.

Equal educational opportunities according to Plato should be compulsory and not sex based (Berne and Stiefel, 1984), this concept is usually enshrined in national constitutions. According to Coleman (1967) in Amaele (2003), in the United States of America, equality of educational opportunities has the following bearings:

*Providing a free education up to the Junior Higher School Level, which constitutes the principal entry point to the labour force; providing a common curriculum for all children regardless of background; providing that children from diverse backgrounds attend the same school; providing equality within a given locality. The above principles imply that equality of educational opportunity provides for free education, common curriculum for all children in various schools, same schools for all children irrespective of background (poor or rich) and the same quality of teachers, same learning facilities, same time, etc. for all.*

In Nigeria, the Education Commission (1964-1966) observed similar objectives which is to equalize opportunities to enable the backward or underprivileged classes of individuals to use education as a lever for the improvement of their condition. Every society that values social justice and is anxious to improve the lot of its citizens ensures progressive equality of educational opportunities to all sections of the population. Government must take action to overcome all forms of inequalities to students' educational participation and ensure equal coverage, both in school location and core academic content - any student willing to work hard has the chance to go as far as his or her talent allows regardless of family origin or socioeconomic status. It also entails providing a common curriculum for all children, regardless of background. The unequal distribution of schools is making the attainment of equal educational opportunities in areas like Port Harcourt Township unachievable. Consequent to this failure, a sizeable number of school-going age children are out of school. This category of Nigerians are prone to street hawking, unwanted pregnancies, prostitution, etc.

### **Access to Education**

The term access to education can be described as the opportunity to participate in the education sector, whether formal or informal (Ehiamezor, 2005). Education can only be said to be accessible when educational institutions, qualified teachers, teaching aids etc, are spread evenly. The opportunity to acquire education may abound in a society, but if this opportunities are unequally distributed, then students in some areas of the society may be deprived of the access to these educational opportunities. All persons ought to be given favorable conditions to access education (Okeke, 2016; 138). One major goal of the Nigerian National Policy on Education is the provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system (NPE 2008; 11).

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2003), access to education means ensuring that everyone who is entitled to education to receive it. This implies that the recipient has to be qualified. For example, to qualify for primary education one must have attained the stipulated age of six years, to qualify for access to secondary education, the recipient must have completed his primary education and to qualify for access to university education, one must have completed his secondary education (Alumode, 2010). Thus, access to education is the right to be educated as provided by Nigerian Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the Dakar Framework for Action, the Ouagadougou 1992 Declaration on Education of Women and Girls, the Amman 1996 Affirmation of the Pursuit of the Goals of Jomtien, the Durban 1998 State of Commitment on Inter-

African Collaboration for the Development of Education and the African Union (AU) 1997 – 2006 decade of education in Africa, all these emphasizes access to education for all (Mukoro, 2013).

### **Location of Schools**

Location of a school refers to its position or site in the physical environment. School location according to Joseph, (2015) is the area where the schools are built in relation to the distance from residence of the learner. Hence, a school can be said to be “very far”, “far” or “closely located”. Unplanned location of schools have limited the spread of education to few centers.

Different studies by various researchers have shown that the location of school is crucial to student’s attitude to school and their academic performance. Raychaudhuri, Debnath, Sen, and Majumder (2016) posit that there is a positive relationship existing between school location and students’ academic performance, when the distance from home to school is not much, the students will be regular to school. Distance in association with location of the school seems to be a strong influencing origin for academic performance among students, this was evidenced by Obamaeta (1995) and Obayan (2003) who confirmed that school physical environment exerts dominant influence on students’ academic performance.

The expansion of primary education have created demand for Post-Primary Education which calls for adequate number of public secondary schools to cater for the huge number primary school leavers passing into the secondary levels of education (UNICEF, 2006). Most parents prefer sending their children to public secondary schools due to the unprecedented high cost of fees in private secondary schools, and the lack of female public secondary schools in the study area has led female school students to seek access to education in distant public secondary schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Theory of Equality of Educational Opportunity**

There should be an equal opportunity for all. Each and every child should have as great or as small an opportunity as the next person. There should not be unfair, unequal, superior opportunity of one child over another. This is the theory postulated by Leonard Hirshberg (1917). This is a stipulation that all people should be treated similarly, unhampered by artificial barriers or preferences. This was also expressed by Milton and Rose Friedman in their 1980 “Book Free to Choose”. Thus there should be no arbitrary obstacles blocking a person from realizing their ambitions, and that “not birth, nationality, colour, religion, sex, nor any other irrelevant characteristics should determine the opportunities that are open to a person – only his abilities”.

Deducing from this theory, many secondary school students from Port Harcourt Township had had unequal opportunities on education due to the distant location of their schools. This denial is based on the cost and affordability of transport fares to distant secondary schools.

### **Empirical Review**

Poor academic achievement has been associated with the location of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township. This is supported by various studies conducted by researchers, for instance, according to Joseph, (2015:4) long distance to school reduces the ability of learners to focus their attention on studies. In some cases, because of traveling long distances without assured transport, female students are trapped into unhealthy sexual practices. Engel Brecht et al. (1996) in Joseph, (2015) revealed that the distance traveled by students from their home to school correlated positively with academic performance of the students. The researcher elaborates that most of the students were affected by the distance which made them use most of their time on traveling than learning. In a study conducted by Moyo (2013) in Joseph (2015). It was asserted that walking over long distances to and from school might lead to lateness to school. Also associated with longer walking distance is fatigue, loss of interest in



learning and hunger which lead to drowsiness during learning. Similarly, Galabawa (2002) revealed that when schools are located far distance from home, academic performance of learners is affected, as most of them remain with little time to concentrate on their studies due to long distances they travel to reach their schools. Walking/traveling distance as has been identified by several researchers appears to be a common factor for poor academic achievement. Adell (2002) in Joseph (2015) argued that poor performance in schools is an international problem that has been linked to the low socio-economic background of the learners and school location. Besides the study by Brecht, Kruger and Booysen (1996) in assessing the provision of education revealed that performance of learners does not exist in a vacuum as it is closely linked to the broad social, economic and political structures that particular society. Therefore, access to quality secondary education is essential for developing active workforce for socioeconomic development

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The description survey research design was used in carrying out this study. The sample for this study consists of eighty (80) respondents of which 20 parents/guardians and sixty (60) public secondary schools students were selected. The study was restricted to female public secondary schools students and parents/guardians that were considered relevant to the issues investigated. Simple percentages and charts were used to analyze the data.

### **Population of the Study**

A population is any group of individuals that have one or characteristics in common and that is the in the interest of the researcher (Best and Kahn, 2006). The population for the study is estimated to be over 100,000.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques were used in the study. This was aimed at obtaining reliable data from the selected respondents. Parents/guardians were purposively involved to share their experiences on the effects of location of secondary schools for the girls on students' academic performance and the students who had to travel a long distance to school were also purposively involved because they were directly affected.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for this study include maps and questionnaires. The questionnaire was used to collect the views of the respondents. Two questionnaires were used. The first was directed to the parents/guardians, while the second was directed to the public secondary school student. The map was used to identify the relative locations and distances of schools from student's homes. To ensure validity of items, the questionnaire was subjected to the course adviser and other lecturers for correction. This is to ensure that the study achieved its purpose. Also for the reliability of this work, the researchers administered the same questionnaire to twenty people that were not part of the selected size at a one week interval. Using the test-retest method, a correlation of 0.95 was gotten. A Kuder Richardson's correlation indicated that the instrument is 95% reliable.

### **Data Presentation**

The primary data obtained for this study is through the issuance of the questionnaires which were presented using percentages and charts. A total of 80 questionnaires were administered. 20 were administered to parents/guardians while 60 were administered to female public secondary school students. Below is the presentation of the data:

## Discussion of Results

A total of 20 parents/guardians (6 male and 14 female) and 60 female public secondary school students (60) were sampled in this study. 40% of parents/guardians sampled fall within the productive age bracket of 40 to 50, while 3% are within 60 years and above. 25% of students sampled were SS1 classes, whereas the least samples (6.7%) were SS3 classes.

In this regard, the study reveal that a total of 75% of female public secondary school students in Port Harcourt township travel a round trip distance of over 7km daily to their schools. 75% agree that their school is very far from home and 80% of public secondary school students insist that it is very important to have a public secondary school in their locality. The major mode of transportation is by bus/taxi as stated by 90% of the sampled students. A major implication is that whenever there is fuel hike or strike by taxi and bus drivers, students in public secondary school in Port Harcourt township may not be able to attend school.

High cost of transportation, lateness to school and low academic performance rank among the highest effect of the distance on public secondary school on students in Port Harcourt township. Therefore, 75% of parents of students in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt township are able to pay ₦1,000 to ₦10,000 per term for their wards. The average daily cost of transporting a child school is ₦300 per day. And because most parents in Port Harcourt township have an average of more than 2 children in public secondary schools, the average present cost of transportation is over ₦19,500.00 per child per term (13 weeks) and this will be a huge burden for a parent having 3 children in a public secondary who will have to pay a total of over ₦58,500.00 every term.

When parents do not have this transport fares for their children, 80% of female public secondary school students living in Port Harcourt township stay at home, and only 10% are able to go to school. All the parents in this study agree that the high cost of private secondary schools is the major reason why their children are attending public schools many kilometers away from home. Weakness and inability to concentrate during class sessions, late attendance to classes and absenteeism are major setbacks to female students of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt township.

Teachers punish students as a result of lateness and this makes them loose concentration on school lessons which has psychological related problems. It was established that most of the latecomers missed lessons offered in the first periods as they travel from as far as Borokiri to Model Secondary School GRA Phase II, Government Girls Secondary School, Orominike and Government Girls Secondary School, Rumueme, Mile IV with distances (to and fro) ranging from 23.8 to 30.2km.

## List of Public Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Township

There are three (3) public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township, two are boys school and one (Government Secondary School, Harold Wilson Drive) is mixed. Below is a table showing the list of public secondary schools and an indication of their gender.

Table 2: List of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township

S/N	Name of School	Gender Status
1	Comprehensive Secondary School, Borokiri	Boys School
2	Enitonna High School, Borokiri	Boys School
3	Government Secondary School, Harold Wilson Drive)	Mixed (UBE)



Fig 3: Locations of public secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township (Source: Google Earth, 2017)

### List of Public Secondary Schools Attended by Female Students Outside Port Harcourt Township

The girl child living in Port Harcourt township travels an average of 27.1km (to and fro) daily to access secondary school education in GRA Phase II, D-line and Rumueme, Mile IV. Below is a table showing approximate distances of schools attended by the girl child from Port Harcourt township.

**Table 3.** List of Public Secondary Schools Attended By Female Students Outside Port Harcourt Township

S/N	Name of School	Gender Status	Approx. Distance (To and Fro)		
			Lagos Stop	Bus	Sandfield, Borokiri
1	GGSS, Rumueme, Mile IV	Girls	14.8km		27.4km
2	GGSS, Orominike, D-Line	Girls	11.2km		23.8km
3	Model Sec. Sch., GRA Phase II	Mixed	17.6km		30.2km

Source: Google Earth



Fig 4: Public secondary schools attended by female students outside Port Harcourt township and their major routes (Source: Google Earth, 2017)

### Conclusions

The importance of equal educational opportunities and the distribution of public secondary schools for the girl child cannot be underestimated especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century when national and international



awareness is commonplace. Every child of school going age should have equal educational opportunities which entails that schools should be distributed evenly to enable students' easy access. The philosophy and goals of education in the National Policy of Education in Nigeria, No. 6, section C, which aims to provide equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system (NPE, 2013:2) cannot be achieved in Port Harcourt Township if pragmatic measures are not taken to ensure that the girl child have access to secondary education.

There are no adequate girl's schools in Port Harcourt Township, and the absence of public secondary schools for the girl child in the study area have serious implications on the students. The implications of the study show that:

- i. Absenteeism can become a syndrome due to the long distance.
- ii. Students can suffer from exhaustion and headaches, therefore the distances to school must be minimized.
- iii. The distance will always matter to parents because it determines the child's performance.
- iv. Paucity of funds for transportation may cause absenteeism
- v. Some students may be discouraged and as a result drop out from school.

Secondary schools should be easily accessible and within a maximum of 2km from student's homes as against the policy on location which have placed priority on primary schools only, not considering the distance secondary school students cover to access education. With is, students will not be exposed to the numerous dangers and stress associated to long journeys to school.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendation are made:

- i. Two new secondary schools are suggested based on an average distance of 2km to residence of students in Port Harcourt Township. The first new secondary school known as "School A" should be located between Crowther Street and Rebisi streets as shown on the map in fig 4. The second new secondary school known as "School B" should be located along Harbour Road as shown on the map in fig 4.
- ii. The education planners and policy makers should come up with a policy on appropriate distances of school location for secondary schools in the country.

When these recommendations are implemented, there shall be three (5) secondary schools in Port Harcourt Township and is hoped to provide access to quality education and equal opportunities for both male and female public secondary school students in Port Harcourt Township.



Fig 5: Location of new Secondary Schools "A" and "B"

## Recommendation for Further Studies

1. Further studies should be conducted to ascertain the effect of location of school on students' academic performance in Port Harcourt Township.
2. Similar study should be replicated in other areas to determine the effect of distance on students' academic performance.

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