

Girl-Child Education in the Western Area Rural District of Sierra Leone

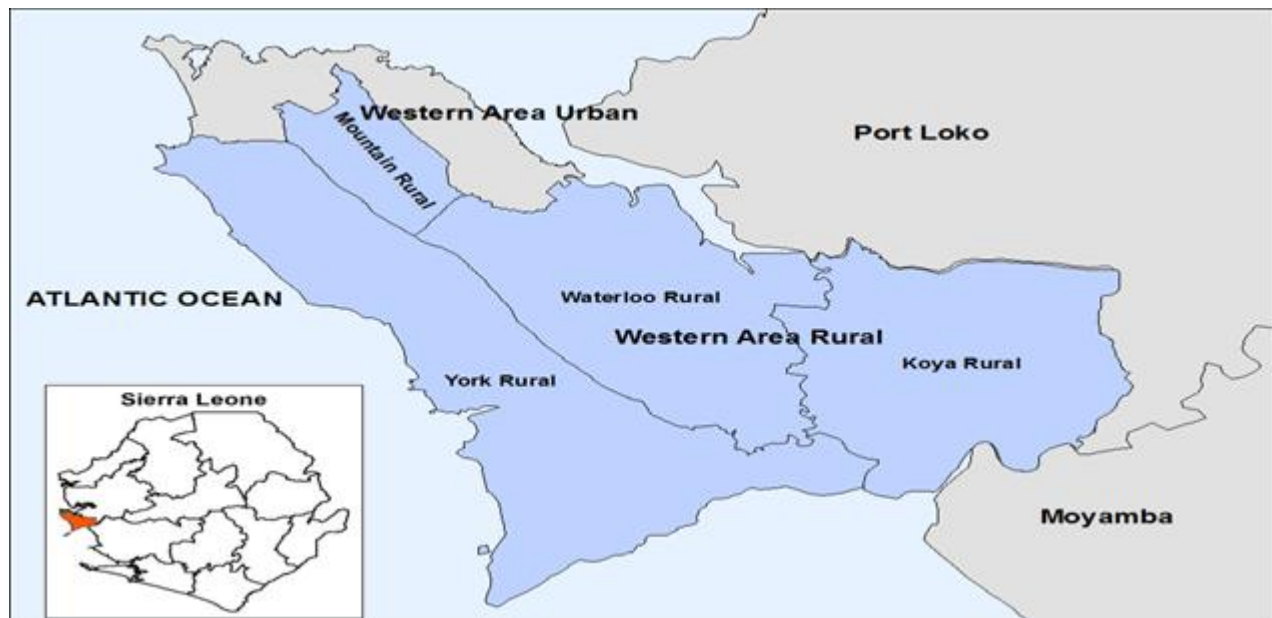
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Abstract: Education is a strategic tool used in promoting national development. Education of the girl-child is a serious challenge for most African countries especially Sierra Leone and as such requires urgent intervention from government and key developmental partners (George, 2020).

Keywords: Girl-child; Education; Primary data; Secondary data; Sample size; Donor partners



Source: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources>

1. Introduction

- Girl-child education goes beyond sending girl-children to school but rather involves the provision of conducive learning environment in schools, acquisition of requisite skills to adequately function in the labor market, ability to make appropriate decisions and act as an agent of change in order to promote societal development (The World Bank, 2017).
- Even though, the definition of children varies from country to country; yet the United Nations refers to any person below 18 years of age as a child. The 2007 Sierra Leone Child Rights Act defines child as person below 18 years of age (Forson & Yalancy, 2017).
- On the contrary, (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2017) defines girl-child as female children within the ages of 0-9 years. This presentation considers girl-child as any person between the ages of 6-17 years.
- Extreme poverty, socio-cultural practices, lack of educational facilities in communities and religious beliefs

and practices are all significant factors affecting the education of the girl-children in the district.

- Educating girl-children (who later becomes women) will lead to a healthier society, increase family livelihood, significant reduction in teenage pregnancy, promote educational values in the home and community.
- These children are entitled to have free access to basic education in Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, the rights of the girl-children are usually denied and this leads to the lack of education suffered by them across the country. Such denials are responsible for societal backwardness, child labor, increased prostitution, child trafficking especially female children who are more vulnerable in rural communities and loss of untapped potentials among girl-children.

2. Problem Statement

The western area rural is the closest district to Sierra Leone's main capital, Freetown; as such, easy for provincial

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people to settle down. Some people usually collect children from the provinces with the pretext of sending them to school in Freetown then, started exploiting them in the western area rural communities. In fact, that is responsible for the largest increase in population in the western area rural; which had a 2.8 per cent increase (Weekes & Bah, 2017).

The communities in the district hold a perception that male children should be sent to school but their female counterparts should be involved in activities such as; early marriages, stay at home to do domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning of the house etc., forcefully giving to female societies such as “The bondo secret society”; which is an act of female genital mutilation (FGM) and petty trading.

In spite of the many interventions from governments and other NGOs, the abuse suffered by the girl-child in the educational sector is still alarming within the district. In essence, this research will examine the contributions of government and other developmental partner’s in combating this menace in the western area rural of Sierra Leone.

2.1 Objectives of the research

- To examine the influence of government and donors’ interventions on girl-child education in the district
- Evaluating community perception on girl-child education

2.2 Research hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: government and other developmental partner’s interventions do not have significant effect on girl-child education in the district

H₁: government and other developmental partner’s interventions have significant effect on girl-child education in the district.

Hypothesis 2:

H₀: community perception does not aid in the fight against girl-child education in the district.

H₁: community perception aids the fight against girl-child education in the district.

3. Conceptual framework

- Education is a systematic training process that enables one to learn skills, acquire knowledge and understand themselves and their environments (Okafor, 2010).
- According to Albert Einstein “Education is the remnant of what you have after forgetting all you have learnt in school.” In brief, education has to do with the growth and usage of the inner potential not just mere reading and writing as purported by many.
- According to (Okoye, 2001) education is a process where an individual self discovers his/her innate talents, abilities, capacities for his/her good as an individual, society and the world.
- Through education, individuals learn and follow proper health guidelines, values and practices that promote

healthy living as well as strengthen their economic contribution to society (Uzoma, 2013).

- (Offorma, 2009) refers to girl-child education as a form of education that equips girl-child with the requisite skills, capacity and knowledge to overcome and cope with the trials of life.

4. Empirical framework

- (Abbagana, 2013) looked at female-child education as a critical issue for national development in Nigeria and concluded that female-child education eliminates poverty, backwardness and diseases in the country and enhances personal and national development. The researcher further recommended the following; robust community sensitization to promote female-child education, provide parents with financial incentives to help support the education of their girl-children, active community participation in the planning and management of education and development of balanced curriculum and educational policies to promote gender equality.
- (kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013) investigated cultural traditions and practices of the parents as barriers to girl-child education in Zamfara State, Nigeria. The researcher discovered that developing countries have huge trunk of its children population that have no access to primary education and the slow pace of girl-child enrolment in schools is deeply connected to the cultural traditions and practices of the parents.
- (Somani, 2017) looks at the global perspective of the importance of educating girls for societal development. This study aimed at knowing the significance and impact of girls’ education, discover the gender gap and key barriers to girls’ education and proffer reliable tactics to mitigate this gender gap. The researcher discovered that respondents believe that education is a fundamental human right that every girl-child must have access to, respondents confirm the positive impacts of girls’ education on societal development.
- (Okafor, 2010) conducted a research on factors affecting women education in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria. The study aimed at examining the issue of gender inequality in education in both historical and contemporary context and some of the barriers against women education in Maiduguri. The study shows that parents’ attitude towards women education is negative and as such has contributed immensely to the significant rise in gender inequality in the educational sector.

5. Research Methodology

This research follows the mixed method where both quantitative and qualitative designs are employed. Quantitative, because the researcher wants to establish the relationship between government and other developmental partner’s interventions and its impact on girl-child education using statistical tools and techniques.

Purposive and simple random sampling method was used data collection. Western area rural has a total population of 444,270 people (all categories included). The researcher draws it sample size from the aforementioned population.

The researcher used Cochran’s formula to determine sample size of this study given the following details; Population size (444,270), confidence level (95%) and (5%) margin of error.

There are two sources of data for this research and these are primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include questionnaires, interviews and focus group which are mostly used for qualitative research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) while books, online articles and reports constitute the secondary sources of data. The research instruments used are well-structured questionnaires and structured interviews. The researcher adopted the face to face approach in administering the above-mentioned instruments. The questionnaires are user friendly as possible to enable the respondents in providing reliable information with ease thus, helping the researcher in achieving the research objectives. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the collected data.

6. Research Analysis

200 questionnaires were distributed and 180 of these questionnaires were returned, displaying an average return rate of 90% questionnaires. The amount retrieved thus represents 90% of the total questionnaires administered, which is rational enough to draw valid research conclusions.

Table 1: Percentages of Questionnaires distributed and collected

Questionnaire	Respondents	Valid Percentage (%)
Returned	180	90
Not Returned	17	8.5
Unfilled	3	1.5
Total	200	100

Source: Field survey (2019)

Descriptive statistics on the impact created by government and other developmental partners in the fight against girl-child education in the Western Area Rural District using Mean, Standard Deviation and Variance

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics 1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Government is doing enough to address the problem of girl-child education in the district	180	1.00	5.00	2.2833	1.07420	1.154
Developmental partners are doing enough to help solve the problem of girl-child education	180	1.00	5.00	2.2056	.97280	.946
The integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight	180	1.00	4.00	1.7667	.66936	.448
Government and other developmental partners know the obstacles in the fight against girl-child education in the district	179	1.00	4.00	1.8380	.72010	.519
Government and other developmental partners cannot win the fight against girl-child education in the district	179	1.00	5.00	3.8324	1.09383	1.196
Valid N (listwise)	178					

Source: Field survey (2019)

Descriptive statistics on the Effect of community perception in the fight against girl-child education in the Western Area Rural District using Mean, Standard Deviation and Variance

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics 2

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Community perception does not help in the fight against girl-child education in the district	179	1.00	5.00	3.2737	1.23522	1.526
Girl-children are not getting equal opportunities as their male counterparts with regards education in the district	179	1.00	5.00	2.8045	1.25456	1.574
Most community people still believe in sending girl-children to school	178	1.00	5.00	2.4326	1.15883	1.343
Parents and guardians of the district are contributing positively to the fight against educating the girl-child	178	1.00	5.00	2.6685	1.17277	1.375
Sending girl-children to school is a taboo for many families in the rural communities	179	1.00	5.00	2.9218	1.28716	1.657
Valid N (listwise)	177					

Source: Field survey (2019)

Table 4: The integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	63	35.0	35.0	35.0
	Agree	99	55.0	55.0	90.0
	Neutral	15	8.3	8.3	98.3
	Disagree	3	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	180	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2019)

From Table 4, it can be deduced that out of 180, 162 of the respondents agreed that the integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight representing (90%), 15 of the respondents were neutral representing (8.3%) and 3 of the respondents disagree representing (1.7%).

Table 5: If you have limited resources to send your children to school, who would you prefer to send to school?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Boy Child	65	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Girl Child	35	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field survey (2019)

Table 5 shows 100 respondents interviewed, 65 of which choose to send their boy-child to school instead of girl-child representing (65%) and 35 choose to send their girl-child to school instead of boy-child representing (35%).

Testing Hypothesis 1

Interpretation of the Results

The above question has a t-value (calculated value) of 35.410 and a critical value of 1.9733 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 179.

Table 6: One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
The integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight	180	1.7667	.66936	.04989

Source: Field survey (2019)

Table 7: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
The integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight	35.410	179	.000	1.76667	1.6682	1.8651

Source: Field survey (2019)

Testing Hypothesis 1 (Decision)

- From the above interpretation, it is true that the calculated value (35.410) is greater than the tabulated value and as such the null hypothesis (H0) should be rejected in favour of the alternate hypothesis (H1). In other words, the alternate hypothesis should be accepted.
- In addition, the p-value (0.000) of the above table is less than 0.05 which is the level of significance; suggesting that the null hypothesis should be rejected.
- However, the mean difference of the null hypothesis is expected to be zero (0) and zero does not fall anywhere in the confidence interval. Because zero falls outside the confidence interval, the null hypothesis should be rejected at 95% confidence interval.
- Hence, the integrated approach from government and other developmental partners interventions have significant effect on girl-child education in the district.

Testing Hypothesis 2

Interpretation of the Results

The above question has a t-value (calculated value) of 29.061 and a critical value of 1.9734 at 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 178.

Table 8: One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Community perception does not help in the fight against girl-child education in the district	179	2.8212	1.29883	.09708

Source: Field survey (2019)

Table 9: One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Community perception does not help in the fight against girl-child education in the district	29.061	178	.000	2.82123	2.6297	3.0128

Source: Field survey (2019)

Testing Hypothesis 2 (Decision)

- The above interpretation shows that the calculated value (29.061) is above the tabulated value and as such the null hypothesis (H0) should be rejected. In other words, the alternate hypothesis should be accepted.
- Also, the p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05 which is the level of significance; suggesting that the null hypothesis should be rejected.
- However, the mean difference of the null hypothesis is expected to be zero (0) and zero does not fall anywhere in the confidence interval. Because zero falls outside the

confidence interval, the null hypothesis should be rejected at 95% confidence interval.

- Therefore, community perception aids in the fight against girl-child education in the district.

7. Research Findings

This research discovered that the problem facing girl-child education in the district can be easily addressed when there is a concerted effort from government and other developmental partners.

- 1) 90% of respondents agreed that the integrated approach from government and other developmental partners will create significant impact in this fight. Thus, reinforcing the positive influence government and other developmental partner's interventions has on girl-child education in the district. See **Table 4**.
- 2) 65% of respondents prefer to send their boy-child to school instead of girl-child. Demonstrating that the perception of the community people has significant effect on the fight against girl-child education in the district. See **Table 5**.

8. Recommendations

- 1) Strengthen the monitoring exercise of the 'free quality education program' to ensure that rural communities are benefitting more. 89.4% respondents alluded to the fact that poverty is still a major challenge to girl-child education in the district according to the research.
- 2) Government should embark on robust sensitization exercise on girl-child education especially in rural communities. 67.8% respondents subscribed to the fact that parents are refusing to send their girl-children to school because of ignorance.
- 3) Government should set up a coordinating (central) unit that will be advising donors on the most pressing issues in the rural communities that need urgent intervention. This unit will help to mitigate the solitary approach used by both government and donors in addressing key developmental issues in the community.
- 4) Create employment and make these communities have some basic social amenities
- 5) Donor partners should engage the community people in sincere discussions before initiating community intervention.
- 6) There is the need for donors to have residing offices in these communities to help gain the confidence of the people and be able to understand what the community beliefs and practices are.
- 7) Donor partners should complement each other's effort rather than seeing themselves as rivals. They should collaborate with each other to solve community problem than working in silos.
- 8) Parents in the community should see their children as potential leaders that should be given the opportunity to learn rather than sacrificing their future for some misguided cultural practices.
- 9) Community people should embrace government and donor's effort in solving their community challenges.

9. Conclusions

From this research, it can be concluded that having a concerted effort from both government and donor partners in addressing girl-child education will create significant impact in curbing this menace than having these state actors working in solitary manner to solve the problem. Sometimes, the community people get confused with having to deal with several donor partners addressing similar issues at the same time rather than coming together to upgrade their operations for the betterment of the people. This kind of operation by government and donor partners cut across the entire country thus, leading to snail-pace growth in rural

communities in the midst of significant investments. Substantial funds are put into these community projects with little or no achievement to show for the spending. Project which is supposed to be an instrument of development is now becoming another thing for these community people. Huge sums of money are spent but little is realized in terms of community development. Therefore, the community people continue to wallow in poverty while these donor partners keep praise singing their efforts in the district. There is total disconnect between donor efforts and community realization.

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