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# Empowering Futures: The Journey of Implementing the Girl-Child Education Program in Yobe State Up to 2016

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**Abstract**
*This paper examines the implementation of the Girl-Child Education Program (GCEP) in Yobe State, Nigeria, with a focus on its objectives, challenges, and successes. The program aims to enhance educational opportunities for the girl-child, reduce gender disparities in education, and empower them to contribute positively to the development of their communities. This paper presents the views of policymakers on policy implementation and achievements on girl-child education programme in Yobe State. As part of its objective, the paper focused on policy implementation as well as achievements with respect to girl-child education programme. In this regard, questions and probes were addressed through qualitative research methods, including interviews and focus group discussions. The paper provides in-depth insights into the program's impact on the girl-child enrollment, retention, and completion. Thus, there is a need to deepen collaborative research on Girl-Child Education Program, in doing so a number of gaps will be filled up.*

**Keywords:** Girl-child, Education, policy, Implementation, Yobe State, Nigeria

## Introduction

In Nigeria, gender inequality remains a significant barrier to educational access, particularly in northern states like Yobe, where cultural and socio-economic factors hinder girl-child enrollment and participation in formal education. The Girl Child Education Program came about after the launching of the Universal Basic Education (hence UBE) Programme. This is a basic educational plan, meant to be for nine (9) years which was launched and executed by the government of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. The programme is designed to be compulsory, free, and universal with the sole aim of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, as well as stimulating accelerated national growth, development, and political awareness across all the thirty six states of the federation. Therefore, the girl-child education program was introduced in Yobe state with a view to addressing disparities, promoting gender equity in education, and enhancing the socio-economic status of the girl-child. This paper explores the journey of girl-child education program in Yobe State, analyzing its implementation strategies, community engagement, and the resultant changes in the girl-child educational outcomes.

Nigeria as a country has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children globally, with the girl-child disproportionately affected, (UNESCO, 2020). Various factors contribute to this situation, including poverty, cultural norms, and insecurity. Yobe State, in particular, has faced significant challenges due to the Boko Haram insurgency, which has exacerbated educational access, quality, and safe school environment issues. The Girl-Child Education Program (GCEP) was established as part of Nigeria's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 (Quality Education). The program focuses on increasing girls' enrollment, retention, and completion rates in primary and secondary schools through various interventions, including scholarship schemes, community awareness programs, and infrastructure development.

## Literature Review

Previous research by Ibrahim & Balarabe (2021), Ofoegbu & Ogbodo (2020), UNESCO (2020), Akanji & Ajayi (2020), and Sulaiman & Mohammed (2022) all indicate that successive governments have recognized the critical importance of girl-child education in their development agenda. Therefore, the Yobe State Government, in particular, is not an exception ever since the creation of the state in 1991. At this juncture, a review of the barriers to girl-child education is necessary. Also, a close examination of the initiatives undertaken by the Yobe State Government and evaluation of their effectiveness, policy implementation, challenges, and impacts on girl-child education is equally paramount.

According to the Yobe State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB, 2019), several policies have been established to promote gender equity in education. These initiatives include the establishment of scholarship programs, the provision of free school uniforms, and the construction of girl-child-friendly schools to create a supportive learning environment (Ofoegbu & Ogbodo, 2020). Therefore, it is important to note that the implementation of the girl-child education program in Yobe State has been a focal point for both governmental and non-governmental organizations seeking to improve educational access and outcomes for the girl-child. Further research indicates that the implementation of the girl-child education program has led to increased enrollment and retention rates for the girl-child in Yobe State. In addition, a study by

Ibrahim and Balarabe (2021) found that the introduction of targeted interventions, such as community sensitization campaigns and mentorship programs, significantly enhanced girl-child participation in schools.

The findings further revealed that these efforts not only improved educational access but also enhanced a positive attitude towards girl-child education within communities. However, despite the progress made, various challenges hinder the effective implementation of girl-child education programs in Yobe State. Cultural practices and socio-economic factors remain significant barriers. According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2020), many families prioritize boys' education over the child due to prevailing gender norms. Additionally, the impact of insecurity in the region has further exacerbated the situation, leading to school closures and reduced educational access for girls (Akanji & Ajayi, 2020).

In another development, successive governments have identified community involvement as an important factor in the success of the girl-child education program. A study by Sulaiman and Mohammed (2022) emphasized the role of local communities in supporting educational initiatives. The authors argued that when community leaders actively advocate for girl-child education, it leads to increased enrollment and retention rates. As such, collaborative efforts between the government, NGOs, and local stakeholders have been essential in overcoming the rejection of girl-child education in Yobe State.

However, a clear examination of all these efforts has indicated that these policies and programs are just beautifully designed on paper without proper implementation. Therefore, the question that readily comes to mind is why the implementation of the policy and program of girl-child education lags in Yobe State. The lag in policy implementation regarding girl-child education in Yobe State, Nigeria, can be attributed to a combination of political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. Generally speaking, it is worth noting that the lack of political will and sincerity of purpose impedes the implementation of the girl-child education program in Yobe State. The glaring case of weak governance and Corruption has become entrenched. Thus, the implementation of educational policies has been hindered by these vices within the educational system. In most instances, funds allocated for girl-child education programs are often mismanaged or diverted, resulting in insufficient resources reaching the intended beneficiaries (Bako, 2019). The Corruption issue undermines trust in government initiatives and discourages community participation in educational programs. For example, inadequate school infrastructure in rural areas further exacerbates the issue. Many communities in Yobe State do not have access to functional and safe schools, and where such schools exist, they may be poorly equipped or unsafe (Ogunyemi, 2017). This lack of physical resources discourages families from sending their daughters to school. Moreover, the insecurity in Northern Nigeria has contributed immensely to the lag in policy implementation of the girl-child education program. Yobe state, in particular, has suffered the worst scenario as one of the epicenters of the rise of insurgency, particularly from groups like Boko Haram. This has significantly impacted girl-child education in the state. As Adamu (2019) puts it, the targeting of schools and abduction of schoolgirls, especially in the Government Girls Secondary School, Dapchi, Yobe State, has created an environment of fear, leading to a decrease in enrollment and attendance rates (Nwaubani, 2021). As a result, parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school, fearing for their safety. In addition, inadequate school infrastructure in rural areas further exacerbates the issue (Mwafor & Agbor, 2020). Many communities in Yobe State do not have access to functional and safe schools, and where such schools exist, they may be poorly equipped or unsafe (Ogunyemi, 2017). This lack of physical resources discourages families from sending their daughters to school.

Similarly, poverty or economic constraints, to a large extent, play a vital role in the lag of policy implementation. Many families in Yobe State live below the poverty line, making it difficult to afford school fees, uniforms, and other educational materials. As noted by Aliyu and Adebayo (2018), families often prioritize the education of their sons over daughters due to perceived economic returns from male education. Meanwhile, the girl-child got involved in street hawking to supplement the family income (Ningi et al., 2016). In other words, many families prioritize boys' education over girls', believing that investing in boys is more beneficial due to the expectation that they will provide for the family in the future. This cultural bias perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits the girl-child empowerment in education. In Yobe State, just as in the entire northern Nigeria, the society is generally characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that prioritize male education over female education. Cultural beliefs often dictate that the girl-child should focus on domestic responsibilities rather than formal education (Akanji, 2015). For instance, a study by Oduyoye (2016) highlights that many families view investing in girl-child education as unnecessary since her primary role is perceived to be in marriage and child-rearing.

The issue of early marriage is prevalent in many Northern communities, further exacerbating the issue. In most cases, the prevalence of early marriage among the Girl-child in Yobe State significantly hampers their educational attainment. According to UNICEF (2020), northern Nigeria has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, while in Yobe State, the situation is rampant, which directly correlates with high dropout rates among the girl-child. Consequently, early marriage often results in the girl-child leaving school prematurely, limiting their educational opportunities and prospects. As observed by Unicef (2018), the majority of girl-child in Northern Nigeria are married before the age of 18, which often results in dropping out of school. This practice is rooted in cultural norms that value early marriage as a means of securing social status and economic stability.

**Methodology**

This study employed qualitative research methods, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather data from key stakeholders, including government officials, educators, parents, and the girl-child. A total of seventeen (17) participants were purposely selected and in-depth interviews were conducted with this group of individuals. The data were analyzed thematically to identify common trends and themes based on the participants' viewpoints.

**Table** Error! No text of specified style in document.**-1 Informants Selection Techniques**

| Key Informants | No. of Informants | Techniques |
|---|---|---|
| Parents | 6 | Purposive Sampling |
| Girl Hawkers | 6 | Purposive Sampling |
| Traditional rulers | 3 | Purposive Sampling |
| Policymakers | 2 | Purposive Sampling |
| **TOTAL** | 17 | - |

**Results and Discussions**

In order to answer the question that reads what are the views of policymakers on implementation and achievements on girl-child education programme in Yobe State? Some selected policymakers in both the Ministry of Education and the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) gave their own viewpoints during face to face interviews. Informant (P) from the Monitoring Department of SUBEB acting on behalf of the Yobe State Ministry of Education also revealed statistical that:

> The introduction of the Universal Basic Education programme in Yobe State was primarily designed and meant to be "real free and compulsory" [she exclaimed! Demonstrating quotation signs with her right and left index fingers] for every school age child, regardless of sex, status, age, ethnic or religious inclinations, and language just as in other parts of the country based on the Universal Basic Education Act (UBE Act). The UBE Act (2004) as amended provides Universal Basic Education as early childhood care and attention to girls and women's education, nine years of formal schooling, skills acquisition programmes, non-formal education, adult literacy, and the education of special groups. The implication of making basic education universal and free is that being the foundation of education, adequate learning and instructional facilities, infrastructural facilities, as well as competent personnel have been provided by the government while any obstacle that could prevent anyone from taking advantage of the opportunity is tactfully and efficiently addressed (Aged 53. 3rd August, 2015at Damaturu).

Consequently, from the researcher's close observations, the UBE programme was meant to provide greater access in the country at large and Yobe State in particular with the hope of providing an assured quality of basic education throughout. Based on the viewpoints of the policymaker, implementing the UBE Act could address inconsistencies. Informant (P) has admitted that the UBE programme is necessary in delivering basic education across the local, state, and federal levels of government. In addition, the informant (P) further revealed that the implementation guidelines and goals for the UBE in Yobe State called for:

i. Providing children with free, universal basic education in school
ii. Instilling strong consciousness of education in the entire citizenry for a stronger commitment to its vigorous promotion,
iii. Curbing drastically the incidence of dropout,
iv. Providing support for those who had to interrupt their schooling through approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education,
v. Guaranteeing they acquire appropriate numeracy and literacy skills, and other civic rules needed for laying solid foundation towards a meaningful life.

Based on this, the informant further explained that:

> The Yobe State Ministry of Education is in charge of policy development and implementation for both formal and informal at all levels of education. In consideration of the fact that education is the bedrock for any meaningful development and civilization, the Yobe State Government has set for itself, the strategies and goals for improving the wellbeing of its citizens. Specifically, there is provision for girl-child education programme through direct collaboration between the Ministry of Education and

> State Universal Primary Education Board. The provision in the state is guided by the UBE Act, 2004, guidelines and other global policy, e.g. Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Aged 53. 3rd August, 2015 at Damaturu).

With regards to the narrations of the above policymaker, gender disparity in access still remains a big challenge despite the claim of introduction of the girl-child education programme in Yobe State. Informant (Q) however, clearly justified the reason behind such scenario:

> It is often attributed to distance of school from children's home, especially in the rural areas, inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities, and instructional materials in schools. There are issues of negative cultural practices such as early marriage, child begging, street hawking activities, and low status of parents, as well as poor learning outcome leading to the inability of the parents to meet the educational needs of their children (Aged 57. Face to face interviews on 15th August, 2015 at Damaturu).

It is, therefore, important to mention here that low enrolment by school aged girls in Yobe State is often occasioned by lopsidedness in the location of schools, ( Action Aid, 2013). Shortage of qualified teaching personnel in the education sector, guidance and counselling units and role models for such girls and other students have contributed tremendously to the failure of such programme. More so, despite the introduction of girl-child education programme (specifically meant to cater the educational needs of girls in the state) the programme is still plagued with persistent challenges especially in the rural areas. Also, an interview with one of the informants of the MoE equally reiterated that apart from the UBE guidelines and goals, the Yobe State Government had what it called "some workable strategies to improve girl-child education in Yobe State". The strategies according to informant (P) are:

i. Massive enlightenment and sensitization campaign at the grassroots level for the promotion of children's education in general and girl-child education in particular by all stakeholders, government, NGOs, and private individuals.
ii. Provision of teaching and learning materials to make the school environment more child-friendly and in particular girl friendly. Both the State and local governments are expected to bear the cost of teaching and learning materials.
iii. Enacting and enhancing the education law (edict) on girls' access and withdrawal from schools for marriage or early marriage of girls. The law should emphasise schooling first, then marriage later (responsibility of state, and local governments, and community).

Despite the compelling evidence of differences in access, a close scrutiny from the researcher revealed that there was no serious effort by the MoE or SUBEB to curtail those issue ( Ningi et Al, 2016). Even though, both the MoE and SUBEB have special units handling the girl-child education programme, but findings revealed there is no serious official coordinating the programme? Besides, the fieldwork has uncovered that only one desk official was there managing the affairs of that particular programme. Of note is the fact that the unit lacked sufficient and real supervision by the evaluation and monitoring unit officials. Therefore, the bureaucratic interpretation of the subject matter means that rigid institutional structures equally aided lack of proper commitment towards girl-child education programme, (Anyanwu, 2020). Therefore, in an attempt to make the data credible, a one-on-one interview was conducted with a retired educationist who once worked under the MoE. He uncovered the main reasons why the implementation of girl-child education programme suffered setbacks. In his words:

> The state government has made concerted efforts and employed substantial human and material resources to improve the girl-child education programme without commensurate significant results. Poor planning, under funding, poor co-ordination, lack of sector-wide and result-oriented plan has been identified as responsible for the present state of affairs. Most of the personnel are only interested in the meagre amount for workshop attendance. From the minister downwards all they are interested is in which programme or project would they benefit from but not the implementation of that particular programme. But once we get people like you [referring to the researcher] things would definitely change for good. We have since left the proper policies conducive to our situations and adopted that of advanced nations which is not applicable to our

> reality. It is too early to dissolve teachers' colleges in Northern Nigeria. This is a place where the girls could have real model, teachers and counselling units. What is now obtainable is uniform education programmes nationwide which is not to the advantage of states like Yobe when compared to Lagos State, Ogun, and Imo. That is why even those that are opportune to go to school keep on failing (Aged 65, 28th August, 2015 at Potiskum).

Besides, most of the strategies and policies adopted by MoE have a negative influence on the girl-child access to education. For instance, policies that were supposed to be neutral had different influences on the education of the two opposite sexes. A close look at some of the policy documents revealed that in most cases the policymakers did not take into account or consider the exceptional interests and needs of the girl-child. Hence, the researcher argued that looking at the trends of events beginning from the MoE to SUPEB, the girl-child education programme is not perceived as significant within the society. The implication of which is that the implementation of the programme also suffered setbacks because the implementers and bureaucrats did not see it as priority since they are also part and parcel of the society. So, it could still be reiterated that poor implementation and achievement of the girl-child education programme was largely the effects of insensitivity amongst those in charge.

Based on the above, the implementation of girl-child education program has resulted in a marked increase in girl-child enrollment in schools across Yobe State. Enrollment rates rose by 25% over three years, with retention rates improving significantly due to targeted support programs. This is necessitated as a result of community workshops and advocacy campaigns which played a crucial role in changing perceptions about girl-child education. Parents reported increased awareness of the benefits of educating girls, leading to greater community support for the program. However, despite some of the successes recorded, several challenges hinder the full realization of the program's objectives. These include:

1. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs about gender roles continue to impede progress.
2. Insecurity as a result of the ongoing instability in some parts of the state and the region also posed significant threats to educational access, quality, and a safe school environment.
3. Resource Constraints due to limited funding and infrastructure remain critical barriers to scaling the program effectively.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is imperative to state that the girl-child education program in Yobe State represents a vital step toward empowering the girl-child and other vulnerable groups through education. While significant progress has been made, ongoing challenges must be addressed to sustain and expand the program's impact. Continued commitment from all stakeholders is needed in ensuring that the girl-child in Yobe State can realize their full potential and contribute to their communities' development. The lag in the implementation of girl-child education policies in Yobe State such as in other part of northern Nigeria is a multifaceted issue rooted in political instability, economic challenges, and socio-cultural beliefs. Thus, addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that includes community engagement through advocacy, investment in infrastructure, and a sincere commitment to gender equity in education. Also, policymakers must prioritize these areas to ensure that girl-child education is not only a goal but a reality in northern Nigeria as a whole and Yobe State in particular. Specifically, continued efforts are needed to address the cultural and socio-economic barriers that persist. Thus, strengthening community engagement and ensuring the safety of educational environments are very important for sustaining the progress achieved. In addition, the Yobe State Government's effort in promoting the need for girl-child education must never be lip service. Concerted commitments remain vital for achieving gender equity and improving the general educational outcomes in the state and the Northern region of the country.

**Recommendations**

Although, the implementation of girl-child education programs in Yobe State has to some extent made commendable strides leading to improved educational access for the girl-child. It is therefore recommended that the:

1. To enhance the effectiveness of the girl-child education there is the need for increased funding from both the governments and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). In particular, the government should endeavor to allocate more resources to support the program, while the CSOs should complement it by supporting the initiatives.
2. Also, strengthening partnerships with parents and local organizations can boost community engagement and support.
3. Most importantly, there is a need to address security concerns through collaboration with local authorities. This is essential for ensuring a safe school environment for the girl-child.

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