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## Affirmative Strategies to Reduce Male Child Disparities in Basic School in Imo State, Nigeria

**ABSTRACT:** This paper had four objectives and research questions each. The study adopted descriptive research design. The population comprised all basic education students and parents in Imo State, while the target population is all basic students and parents in Orlu Senatorial zone in the state. The study sample comprised 621 respondents drawn from 12 LGAs (Local Government Areas) in Orlu Senatorial zone. Multi-stage sampling technique involving simple random sampling, proportional, and stratified sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. The data was gathered with the aid of a questionnaire, which was validated by experts in Research, Measurement, and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient was tested using test-retest and the reliability coefficient was 0.71, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable. The data was, then, subjected to percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The results of the analysis showed the introduction of school feeding programme, free school transportation to and from school, provision of free textbooks, periodic issuance of stipends to students, and provision of free school uniforms and bags. As a result of these affirmative strategies in basic education, the enrolment, participation, and completion rates in basic education have now tremendously increased. The paper concludes that the affirmative strategies adopted by Imo State government in Nigeria could be adjudged to have paid off. It, therefore, recommends amongst others things that the practice should be sustained.

**KEY WORD:** Affirmative Strategies; Male Child Disparities; Basic School Enrolment.

**RESUME:** "Strategi Afirmatif untuk Mengurangi Disparitas Anak Laki-Laki di Sekolah Dasar di Negara Bagian Imo, Nigeria". Makalah ini memiliki empat tujuan dan pertanyaan penelitian masing-masing. Penelitian mengadopsi desain penelitian deskriptif. Populasi terdiri dari semua siswa dan orang tua dari pendidikan dasar di Negara Bagian Imo, sedangkan populasi target adalah semua siswa dan orang tua dari pendidikan dasar di zona Senatorial Orlu di negara bagian. Sampel penelitian terdiri 621 responden yang diambil dari 12 LGA (Wilayah Pemerintah Daerah) di zona Senatorial Orlu. Teknik pengambilan sampel multi-tahap yang melibatkan pengambilan sampel acak sederhana, proporsional, dan stratifikasi digunakan untuk memilih responden. Data dikumpulkan dengan bantuan kuesioner, yang divalidasi oleh para ahli dalam Penelitian, Pengukuran, dan Evaluasi. Koefisien reliabilitas diuji menggunakan test-retest ulang dan koefisien reliabilitas 0.71, menunjukkan bahwa instrumen tersebut sangat handal. Data itu, kemudian, dikenakan persentase, rata-rata, dan standar deviasi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan adanya pengenalan program pemberian makanan di sekolah, transportasi sekolah gratis ke dan dari sekolah, penyediaan buku teks gratis, jaminan uang saku untuk siswa secara berkala, dan pemberian seragam sekolah dan tas gratis. Sebagai hasil dari strategi afirmatif dalam pendidikan dasar ini, maka angka pendaftaran, partisipasi, dan penyelesaian dalam pendidikan dasar sekarang telah sangat meningkat. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi afirmatif yang diadopsi oleh pemerintah Negara Bagian Imo di Nigeria dapat dinilai telah dipenuhi. Karena itu, ia merekomendasikan di antara hal-hal lain bahwa praktek ini harus dipertahankan.

**KATA KUNCI:** Strategi Afirmatif; Kesenjangan Anak Laki-laki; Pendaftaran Sekolah Dasar.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a tool for eradicating all forms of social discriminating, deprivation, and also an instrument for attaining a united and peaceful society. It can be used to bring about innovation that can boost positive and creative result in the lives of its citizenry. Education is, therefore, the machine for innovation, social change, economic transformation, and political advancement (Anosike, 1977; MGIEPSD, 2014; Nnabuo & Asodike, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

There are a lot of ugly situation of male-child drop-out in South Eastern States of Nigeria, despite concrete efforts made by International Human Rights instrument that provide education as a fundamental human right, which included: EfA (Education for All); MDGs (Millennium Development Goals); UNESCO (United Nations Scientific, Education, and Cultural Organizations); UN (United Nations) international covenant on Economics, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1966; Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948; and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981 (UNESCO, 2014; Isokpan, 2016; and Apeh & Onoja, 2018).

I.P. Okafor (2013), and other scholars, further stated that education is a process through which a person acquires knowledge, skills, habits, and values that enable him or her to function effectively and contribute to the development of the society (Adeyemi, 2012; Okafor, 2013; and Chowdhury, 2016). Affirmative strategies, according to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* in 2010, is seen as a policy or programme providing advantages for people of minority group, who are seen to have traditionally been discriminated against with the aim of creating a more egalitarian society through preferential access to education, employment, health, care, social welfare, etc. (cf Lin & Martin eds., 2005; NCSL, 2014; and UNESCO, 2014).

Affirmative actions or strategies in institution or organizations refers to

admission policies that provide equal access to education for the group that have been historically excluded or under-represented, like women, minorities, and boys in American society and the world at large. Affirmative strategies most time focus on employment and education. It is as a result of civil right movement of 1960s. This right motive was to provide equal opportunities for members of minority groups and women in education and employment (Lederer, 2013; NCSL, 2014; and Maxwell & Garcia, 2019).

President John F. Kennedy was the first to use the term in an executive order that directed the government contractors to take affirmative actions to ensure that applicants were employed and that employees were considered during employment in spite of their race, creed, colour, or national origin. It was initially based on American life better for Americans in employment and education. This was made possible through the supreme courts brown board of education decision in 1954 and civil rights act of 1964 had made it possible for African-American students in America (Vertreace, 2010; Golland, 2011; and Martinez, 2014).

The executive order was signed in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson. This was a kind compensation for economic disparity. Despite this measure, there was still gap in college enrolment between minority and white students. UBE (Universal Basic Education) was introduced in 1999 and was not a new phenomenon rather an off-shoot of the UPE (Universal Primary Education) scheme, which was launched in the country in 1976 and abandoned mid-way for UBE (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981; Aluede, 2006; Imam, 2012; Daura & Audu, 2015; and Moultrie, 2016).

An act tagged, UBE Act was enacted on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004, so as to enable the objectives of mission and vision of the scheme to be realized. This led to the establishment of UBE Commission with three sources of funding for the implementation of UBE. These sources are federal grant, funds, or contributions in the form of federal guaranteed credits and local or international donor grants, which cover both state and

<sup>1</sup>See also, for example, "Education is Power". Available online at: [www.onedaywages.org/invest](http://www.onedaywages.org/invest) [accessed in Ilorin, Nigeria: May 2, 2019].

the local government, the state government can benefit from the federal government block grant meant for the implementation of the UBE only (FRN, 2004; Anibueze & Okwo, 2013; and Nkiruka, 2015).

The act also provided sanctions for parents and guardians, who refused to send their children and wards to school. The scheme provided free text books in core subjects and abolishment of tuition at lower and upper basic levels. This was to make sure that it was affordable to all class of people in the society. UBE has had a legal backing too and this has made it compulsory for children to participate. The scheme was also planned to give non-formal basic skills and training for youths, who missed the opportunity of going to school from on set a long-life learning (Ozigi & Ocho, 1981; Ogunsanmi & Ibimiluyi, 2014; and Irigoyen, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The UBE Commission, in 2005, listed the objectives of the UBE in its annual report, which included to ensuring that the child has continuous uninterrupted access to 9 years of formal basic education for every Nigeria child of school-going age: reduce drastically the incidence of dropout from formal school system through improved relevance, quality and efficiency, and ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communication, life skills ethical, moral and civic values vital for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning. All these efforts, by the state government, have yielded increase in boy-child enrolment in basic schools in Imo State, Nigeria (FRN, 2004; UBE Commission, 2014; and Irigoyen, 2017).

Imo State lies within the latitudes 4° 45'N and 7° 15'N and Longitude 6°50' E and 7°25' E with an area of around 5,100 km<sup>2</sup>. Imo State is bordered by Abia State on the East, by River Niger and Delta State on the West, by Anambra State in North, and by River State to the South. Besides Owerri, Imo State

<sup>2</sup>See also, for example, "Children's Education: Fuel Hope for the Future Universal Access to Education". Available online at: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/UBE> [accessed in Ilorin, Nigeria: May 2, 2019]; and "Vob Education for Development: Our Vision on Quality Education". Unpublished Paper. Available and owned by the Author.

has had 18 (eighteen) Major Towns and 27 (twenty-seven) Local Government Areas. The estimated population of Imo State was about 4.8 million, which was about 18% of the country's population. The population density varies from 230 – 1,400 people per square kilometer (NBS, 2014; Okorie, 2015; and CA, 2017).<sup>3</sup>

It is an Igbo speaking region with three universities. The myth in origin of the Igbos were traced from Nri and Israel. They were mostly craftsmen farmers, educationalist, but widely known for their engagement in trade and commerce, wherever they find themselves (*cf* Ihejirika, 2010; Ezeudu, Nkokelonye & Adigwe, 2013; and Adeboyejo, 2018).

#### *Problems and Research Questions.*

The increase in male school drop-out at various levels of educational system is visible at basic school and other levels of education in Imo State, Nigeria. This has led to male draught in education in south-east region, because those who are educated have nothing to show for it, in terms of employment, lack of counselling in education, long of process of education with poor numeration in salary, poverty, poverty quest to travel abroad, trade, street hawking, preference for trade, and abandoning schooling for trading or street hawking (UNESCO, 2000; Imam, 2012; and Haider, 2019).

These prompted the government of Imo State to introduce measures, like free text book, free tuition, free transportation, bags, periodic issuance, stipends, increase in salary, creation of employment, and vocational centers, so as to enable the graduates from schools to create job for themselves after schooling. Socio-cultural factors, on the other, hindered the girl-child from school, for example in the north central states of Nigeria, because to their parents believe that education of the girl-child will only benefit their husbands; make them deviate from their religion; make them

<sup>3</sup>See also, for comparison, "State of Osun News: Aregbesola Unveils School Fees Day Programme's Experience at Abuja Summit Today Online Service Nigeria Government". Available online at: [www.ng.site/credits](http://www.ng.site/credits) [accessed in Ilorin, Nigeria: May 2, 2019].

to be wise; and led them to early marriage, farming, and hawking (Osuji, 1989; Oladeji, 2010; and Nkwopara, 2012).

Many researchers have worked on this area, but not on the location of this study. I.P. Okafor (2013), for example, worked on socio-cultural factors and the education of Nupe Junior Secondary girls in north-central Nigeria; while J. Laird, M. DeBell & C. Chapman (2010) and E.T. Egwunyenga & O. Nwadiani (2014), all worked on school drop-out generally (*cf* Laird, DeBell & Chapman, 2010; Okafor, 2013; and Egwunyenga & Nwadiani, 2014).

E.D. Nakplodia (2010) worked on an analysis of drop-out rate among school students in Anambra State, Nigeria in 1999-2005; J. Laird, M. DeBell & C. Chapman (2010) worked on drop-out rates in United States of America; and M. Felter (2019) worked on school drop-out rates, academic performance, size and poverty, correlates of educational reform in educational evaluation and policy analysis (Nakplodia, 2010; Laird, DeBell & Chapman, 2010; and Felter, 2019).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted on affirmative strategies to reduce male-child disparities in basic school in Imo State, Nigeria. So, the following research questions were raised to guide the study: (1) *What are the affirmative strategies adopted by Imo State government to reduce male child abandoning schooling?*; and (2) *What are the most effective affirmative actions adopted by Imo State government to increase male students' enrolment in upper basic school?*

## METHODS

The study employed descriptive research design. The survey method investigates a phenomenon and reports on it, as it is and it encompasses measurement precedence that involve asking question from respondents. Adopting the design involves studying innovative practices to boost basic education in Imo State, Nigeria by the sampled students (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Bennett *et al.*, 2011; and Adegboyega, 2018).

The population for the study consisted of all basic students in Imo State; while the target population was all basic students in Orlu Senatorial Zone, which was made up 12 Local Government Areas. These zones were chosen for this study, because it was regarded as educationally disadvantaged zone in Imo State. Out of 210 (two hundred and ten) schools in Orlu Senatorial Zones, 24 (twenty-four) schools were purposively selected as representative sample. In each local government, two schools were randomly selected; and twenty students were sampled in each school. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to sample parents of these students from all the local government for this study. Total number of 141 (one hundred and fourteen) parents was sampled (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Daramola, 2016; and Taherdoost, 2016).

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire entitled "AATBMCBE (Affirmative Actions to Boost Male Child Basic Education)". The instrument was divided into three sections: section A deals with demographic characteristics of the respondents; section B has list of new innovative, items eliciting respondent's opinion on the introduction of Innovative practices that boost basic education in Imo State, Nigeria; and section C of the instrument elicited information on the new innovative that is most effective in encourages male students to enrolment in school (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; and Daramola, 2016).

The instrument was validated by experts in Research, Measurement, and Evaluation. The reliability coefficient was tested using test re-test and the reliability coefficient yielded 0.71, indicating that the instrument was reliable. The data collected were subjected to percentage and mean ranking (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Daramola, 2016; and Ghazali, 2016).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Results.** It will be elaborated pertaining, firstly, *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*; and, secondly, *Answering the*

**Table 1:**  
Distribution of the Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	335	53.9
Male	286	46.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2:**  
Percentage Analysis of the Distribution of the Respondents by Type of Respondents

Type of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	480	77.3
Parents	141	22.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4:**  
Ranking Order of the Most Effective Affirmative Actions, Imo State

Item No	Most Effective Innovative Practice Imo State	Mean	Ranking
1.	<i>Introduction of school feeding programme</i>	3.81	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2.	<i>Free school transportation to and from school</i>	3.89	1 <sup>st</sup>
3.	<i>Provision of free textbooks</i>	3.51	5 <sup>th</sup>
4.	<i>Periodic issuance of stipends to students</i>	3.62	3 <sup>rd</sup>
5.	<i>Provision of free school uniforms and bags</i>	3.62	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6.	<i>Provision of writing materials</i>	3.51	5 <sup>th</sup>
7.	<i>Employment of new teachers</i>	1.32	7 <sup>th</sup>

*Research Questions.* The elaboration of each section is following here:

Firstly, *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.* Results presented in the table 1 included demographic characteristics of the respondents frequency counts and percentage. Variable used was gender. See table 1.

The data analysis in table 1 indicates that out of the 621 (six hundred and twenty-one) respondents sampled: 335 respondents (53.9%) were females, while the 286 respondents (46.1%) were males. This shows that there were more female respondents than male respondents that participated in this study. See, then, table 2.

The data analysis in table 2 indicates that of the 621 (six hundred and twenty one) respondents sampled: 480 respondents representing (77.3%) were students, while the 141 respondents representing (22.7%) were parents.

Secondly, *Answering the Research Questions.* To answer the Research Question 1: "What are the affirmative actions adopted by Imo State government in Nigeria?", see table 3.

Table 3 shows that a good number of the respondents: 611 (98.4%) agrees that *Introduction of school feeding programme* is a new innovation; while 10 respondents representing (1.6%) of the opinion that *Introduction of school feeding programme* is not a new innovative practice. About 618 respondents, representing (99.5%), agree that *Free school transportation to and from school* is a new innovation; while 3 respondents, representing (0.5%), of the opinion that *Free school transportation to and from school* is not a new innovative practice. About 608 respondents, representing (97.9%), agree that *Provision of free textbooks* is a new innovation; while 13 respondents, representing (2.1%), of the opinion that *Provision of free textbooks* is not a new innovative practice.

About 615 respondents, representing (99.0%), agree that *Periodic issuance of stipends to students* and *Provision of free school uniforms and bags* are new innovative; while 6 respondents, representing (1.0%), of the opinion that *Provision of free textbooks* and *Provision of free school uniforms and bags*

**Table 3:**  
Percentage Analysis of the Innovative Affirmative Actions by Imo State Government

S/N	Item	New Innovative	Not New Innovative
1.	<i>Introduction of school feeding programme</i>	611 (98.4%)	10 (1.6%)
2.	<i>Free school transportation to and from school</i>	618 (99.5%)	3 (0.5%)
3.	<i>Provision of free textbooks</i>	608 (97.9%)	13 (2.1%)
4.	<i>Periodic issuance of stipends to students</i>	615 (99.0%)	6 (1.0%)
5.	<i>Provision of free school uniforms and bags</i>	615 (99.0%)	6 (1.0%)
6.	<i>Provision of writing materials</i>	608 (97.9%)	13 (2.1%)
7.	<i>Employment of new teachers</i>	52 (8.4%)	569 (91.4%)

are not a new innovative practice. Also, 608 respondents, representing (97.9%), agree that *Provision of writing materials* is a new innovation; while 13 respondents, representing (0.5%), of the opinion that *Provision of writing materials* is not a new innovative practice. About 52 respondents, representing (8.4%), agree that *Employment of new teachers* is a new innovation; while 569 respondents, representing (91.4%), of the opinion that *Employment of new teachers* is not a new innovative practice.

To answer the Research Question 2: “Which is the most effective affirmative actions?”, see table 4.

Table 4 indicates that 621 respondents participated in this study. The most effective innovates practice in Imo State, Nigeria to improve male students enrolment to schools was *Free school transportation to and from school*, which has a mean score of 3.89 (1<sup>st</sup>); while *Introduction of school feeding programme*, with a mean score of 3.81 comes 2<sup>nd</sup>; *Periodic issuance of stipends to students* and *Provision of free school uniforms and bags*, which has a mean score of 3.62 were 3<sup>rd</sup>; *Provision of free textbooks* and *Provision of writing materials*, which has a mean score of 2.51 was 5<sup>th</sup>. Other statement has mean score below the benchmark of 2.50.

**Discussion.** Finding revealed that the most effective affirmative actions in Imo State, Nigeria to improve male students’ enrolment to schools was *Free school transportation to and from school*; and *Introduction of school feeding programme*. In this context, the UBE (Universal Basic Education) is a vital programme to all and sundry irrespective of gender, culture, race, creed, tribe, and class (cf Eddy & Akpan, 2009;

Okoro, 2011; and Onyekwena *et al.*, 2017).

So, UBE can be regarded as a kind of education, which is a right and not a privilege to every child. For basic education to benefit all, since it is a total experience child, some affirmative actions has to introduce to boost basic education to areas that lag behind in a particular gender so that every child counts (cf Okafor, 2013; UBE Commission, 2014; Damkor-Ikpa, Agogo & Aboho, 2016; Irigoyen, 2017; and Osarenren-Osaghae & Irabor, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Education develops and empowers people; improves productivity and health; and reduces negative features of life, child labour, ignorance etc. Schools are established as deliberate attempt by societies to teach social values to the younger generation be it male or female. The male-child low access, retention, and completion rates are not only in south east Nigeria. In Caribbean, too, the male-child is disadvantaged in education. These are some of the reasons why much emphasis is placed on all the world citizens to have access to basic education.

Despite all these efforts made by global community successive government have not key to it; and it still reflects inequalities in terms of access to education in general sphere. There is a serious decline in the education of the boy-child education in the Southeast of Nigeria. The total numbers of children, who supposed to be in school, are out of school in the Southeast, because of some economic reasons and those who were opportune to enter school, dropped out of school prematurely.

For education to be useful and meaningful, all hands must be on deck to make UBE (Universal Basic Education), a huge success by ensuring that every child counts irrespective of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and ability.

Accordingly, some recommendations are: (1) Laws should be enacted by the government to make education compulsory, especially at basic level for all school going children; (2) Functional education should be encouraged and students should be trained to be creative and skillful; (3) All stake holders in the government should collaborate to make back to school programme a huge success; (4) Counselling services are needed to counsel male children on the importance of basic education in their lives; (5) Seminars, conferences, radio, and television advertisement should be used to sensitize the general public, especially the boy in the southeast on the importance of education; (6) Successive governments should key in to back to school programme, so as to enable boy-child excel in their education career; (7) Introduction of other forms of innovative practices should be in place in schools in rural areas, like providing gender based toilet facilities, bore hole, electricity, tap water, etc.; (8) Schools should be properly secured; and (9) Education at all levels should government affairs and money meant for education should be properly being invested in education.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>**Statement:** I, undersigned, declare that this article is my own academic work, so it is not the result of plagiarism, and has never been sent, reviewed, and published by another scientific journals. All the sources that I quoted in the analysis, I included correctly and completely in the Reference list. I also will not withdraw this article, if it has passed the review and will be published in the *SOSIOHUMANIKA* journal in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. Thus, I make this statement seriously and responsibly.

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