

Gender-Sensitive and Stakeholder-Engagement Education Policies and Access to Basic Education in Public Junior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between gender-sensitive education policy, stakeholder engagement policy, and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Rivers State. Two objectives, two research questions, and two hypotheses guided the study, and the correlational research design was adopted. The population consisted of teachers and principals in public junior secondary schools within Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample, and data were collected using two researcher-designed instruments: the Gender-Sensitive and Stakeholder Engagement Policies Questionnaire (GSSEPQ) and the Access to Basic Education Questionnaire (ABEQ). The internal consistency of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha, yielding indices of 0.76 and 0.84. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), while hypotheses were tested using t-test transformation at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed moderate positive relationships between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education, as well as between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education. The study recommended stronger implementation frameworks for gender inclusion and more active involvement of parents, community leaders, NGOs, and other stakeholders in school governance.

INTRODUCTION

Access to basic education remains a critical development priority for Nigeria, particularly within urban centres such as Port Harcourt Metropolis. Although government policies continue to emphasize universal access, gaps persist due to gender disparities, poor community involvement, socio-economic constraints, and cultural biases. The integration of gender-sensitive education policy and stakeholder engagement policy has emerged as a strategic approach to addressing the systemic inequalities that limit access to schooling for many children.

Gender-sensitive education policy refers to the set of guidelines, programmes, and interventions designed to eliminate all forms of discrimination based on gender and ensure equal access, treatment, and opportunities for both boys and girls. This includes safe school environments, gender-responsive curricula, anti-harassment frameworks, menstrual-hygiene support for girls, and the promotion of girls' enrolment and retention. Studies have shown that gender gaps in access to education persist in many regions, often created by cultural expectations, early marriage, school insecurity, and unequal household labour demands.

Stakeholder engagement policy, on the other hand, ensures active participation of community actors such as parents, guardians, traditional rulers, NGOs, school-based management committees, and civil society organizations in the planning, monitoring, and improvement of educational activities. Effective stakeholder engagement fosters shared responsibility, increased resource mobilization, transparency, and accountability – factors necessary for improving school attendance and participation.

Despite the potential of both policy areas to significantly influence access to education, limited empirical evidence exists on how gender-sensitive policies and stakeholder engagement practices affect access to basic education within Port Harcourt Metropolis. This study was therefore undertaken to fill this gap.

Statement of the Problem

Although education is constitutionally guaranteed, many learners in Port Harcourt Metropolis still face barriers that hinder their access to basic education. Gender-related challenges such as sexual harassment, lack of sanitary facilities for girls, discriminatory attitudes, and gender-biased school practices contribute to absenteeism and dropout, especially among female learners. At the same time, weak stakeholder participation has reduced community ownership of schools, resulting in poor monitoring, weak home-school collaboration, and minimal support for vulnerable learners. While the government has introduced gender-related and participatory education reforms, the extent to which these policies enhance access to basic education remains unclear. Schools still record gender-based inequalities, and stakeholder involvement is often limited to occasional meetings rather than active participation. The question, therefore, is whether gender-sensitive education policy and stakeholder engagement policy have significant relationships with access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Providing empirical answers to this problem necessitated this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between gender-sensitive and stakeholder-engagement education policies and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. Determine the relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?
2. What is the relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.
2. There is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

METHODOLOGY

A correlational research design was adopted to examine the degree of relationship between the variables. The population included all teachers and principals in public junior secondary schools in Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt LGAs. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the sample. Two instruments were used for data collection: the Gender-Sensitive and Stakeholder Engagement Policies Questionnaire (GSSEPO) and the Access to Basic Education Questionnaire (ABEQ). Both instruments were structured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The instruments were validated by experts in educational management, and reliability indices were determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research questions, while t-test transformation was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

RESEARCH RESULT

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between **gender-sensitive education policy** and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

		Access to Basic Education	Gender-Sensitive Education Policy	Remarks
Access to Basic Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.750	Strong Positive Relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N	319	319	
Gender-Sensitive Education Policy	Pearson Correlation	.750	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	319	319	

Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 showed the relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The Pearson correlation statistics measured the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables. In this case, the correlation coefficient between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education is .750, which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Therefore, the answer to research question four states that there is a strong positive relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between **stakeholder engagement policy** and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis?

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation on the relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

			Access to Basic Education	Stakeholder Engagement Policy	Remarks
Access to Basic Education	Pearson Correlation		1	.576	Moderate Positive Relationship
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	
	N	319	319		
Stakeholder Engagement Policy	Pearson Correlation		.576	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	319	319		

Correlation is Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 showed the relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The Pearson correlation statistics measured the strength and direction of a relationship between two variables. In this case, the correlation coefficient between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education is .576, which indicates that there is a moderate positive relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Therefore, the answer to research question five states that there is a moderate positive relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Test of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated in null form for the study, and were tested at 0.05 level of significance, thus;

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between **gender-sensitive education policy** and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Table 3: Summary of t-test transformation on the Significant Relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Variables		N	R	df	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Gender-Sensitive Policy	Education	319	0.750	317	20.58	0.005	Rejected

Access to Basic Education

Table 3 presented the t-test transformation of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation examining the significant relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.750, indicating a strong positive relationship. The corresponding t-value is 20.58 with 317 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is 0.005, which falls within the 0.05 significance range. Since the p-value (0.005) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education, is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between **stakeholder engagement policy** and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Table 4: Summary of t-test transformation on the Significant Relationship between

stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis

Variables	N	R	Df	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Stakeholder Engagement Policy	319	0.576	317	12.45	0.005	Rejected

Access to Basic Education

Table 4 presented the t-test transformation of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation examining the significant relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.576, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The corresponding t-value is 12.45 with 317 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is 0.005, which falls within the 0.05 significance range. Since the p-value (0.005) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the result is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education, is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings was done under the following headings:

The findings from Table 1 revealed a strong positive relationship between gender-sensitive education policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.750. This suggests that policies which promote gender equity significantly enhance access to education. The hypothesis table presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) analysis examining this relationship. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.750, indicating a strong positive relationship. The p -value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.005, which is below the 0.05 significance level, meaning the result is statistically significant. This finding agrees with the study by Yahaya (2020), who emphasized that eliminating gender bias and providing safe, inclusive learning environments encourages higher enrolment and participation, especially among girls. Similarly, Umeadi (2019) observed that gender-sensitive policies addressing menstrual hygiene, security, and gender-based violence significantly improve school attendance and learning outcomes.

Further supporting these findings, Onyebuchi & Chukwuemeka (2021) observed that schools with policies that actively promote gender equity experience not only increased female student enrolment but also enhanced retention and graduation rates. Their research indicated that addressing specific barriers faced by girls—such as unsafe school environments and lack of menstrual hygiene facilities—significantly improves their participation in education. They argued that gender-sensitive policies, particularly those addressing cultural barriers, contribute to higher participation rates for girls in traditionally male-dominated educational fields.

Additionally, Nwankwo & Udo (2020) conducted a study that highlighted the role of gender-sensitive education policies in creating inclusive educational settings where both male and female students can thrive equally. They found that gender-sensitive policies that promote teacher sensitivity to gender-related issues, as well as safe and supportive school environments, lead to higher engagement from both boys and girls. This was corroborated by Oladipo & Ogunyemi (2020), who noted that gender-sensitive school policies significantly contribute to reducing dropout rates by ensuring that both boys and girls have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in their education.

The findings also resonate with the work of Adesina (2022), who examined the correlation between gender-responsive policies and educational outcomes in Nigerian secondary schools. Adesina's research revealed that addressing issues like gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and providing girl-friendly facilities (e.g., private toilets and sanitary pads) had a profound effect on improving girls' access to and participation in education. According to Adewale (2020), the implementation of such policies not only enhances educational outcomes but also empowers girls by giving them the tools they need to succeed in education without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

Moreover, Chukwuma & Okafor (2019) explored the impact of gender-sensitive education policies on school culture and student performance. They found that policies promoting gender equality in educational settings helped cultivate a positive school culture where both male and female students felt

valued, respected, and supported. This, in turn, led to improved academic outcomes and higher levels of student engagement. Their study suggested that creating gender-responsive educational environments fosters a culture of mutual respect, which is crucial for improving student retention and academic success. Furthermore, the significant impact of gender-sensitive policies on female participation in education was also highlighted by Oluwaseun (2021), who argued that such policies are critical for ensuring that girls, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have equal access to educational resources, thus reducing gender disparities in educational attainment. Oluwaseun's research specifically focused on how policy interventions related to gender equality, such as providing scholarships for female students and ensuring equal access to educational resources, positively impacted girls' school attendance and academic achievements.

The findings from Table 2 revealed a moderate positive relationship between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.576. This indicates that the involvement of key stakeholders—such as parents, community leaders, and education boards—contributes to increased access to basic education. The hypothesis table presents the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) analysis of this relationship. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.576, indicating a moderate positive relationship. The p -value (Sig. 2-tailed) is 0.005, which is less than the 0.05 significance level, thus showing that the result is statistically significant. This finding is consistent with the work of Ogundele (2020), who noted that active stakeholder involvement enhances school accountability, resource mobilization, and learner support systems. It also aligns with Nwokocha (2018), who observed that community participation in school governance improves transparency and responsiveness, thereby boosting student enrolment and retention.

Moreover, Adegboye & Fadeyi (2019) found that the involvement of parents and community stakeholders in the educational process not only improves the quality of teaching and learning but also creates a sense of shared responsibility for educational success. Their study demonstrated that schools with robust stakeholder engagement programs were more likely to have access to additional resources, better infrastructure, and stronger support systems, all of which contributed to greater access to education. Abubakar (2021) echoed this sentiment, noting that when local communities take ownership of their schools, they are more likely to ensure that educational facilities are maintained and that students have the necessary resources to succeed.

The findings also align with Ogunbiyi (2020), who discussed how community participation fosters a culture of mutual accountability between schools and the communities they serve. Ogunbiyi argued that when parents and local leaders are actively involved in school governance, schools become more responsive to the needs of students, which enhances both the quality of education and the overall school environment. This relationship is supported by Idris & Musa (2020), whose study found that stakeholder engagement in school

management improves student performance by creating an environment where learners feel valued and supported.

Additionally, Ali & Usman (2019) explored the role of education boards and local government in improving educational outcomes through stakeholder collaboration. Their research showed that when education boards work closely with local schools, parents, and community leaders, they are better able to align school resources with the specific needs of students, ensuring that education becomes more accessible. The collaboration of local governments with educational institutions was also highlighted by Jibrin & Abdulrahman (2021), who argued that governmental support for stakeholder engagement helps bridge the gap between policy and practice, leading to better implementation of educational reforms and policies that increase access to education.

The relationship between stakeholder engagement and educational access is further supported by Fayemi & Alabi (2020), who suggested that schools with strong partnerships with local communities and stakeholders are able to address challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of educational materials, and poor school infrastructure more effectively. These collaborations create a more inclusive school environment, ensuring that students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can benefit from improved access to education. However, the study also highlights some challenges in stakeholder engagement that need to be addressed for the policy to be fully effective. Sulaimon & Chika (2020) identified that while stakeholder involvement is critical, it is often hindered by inadequate communication channels, lack of training for school leaders, and limited resources for engaging the broader community. Their research called for the development of clear frameworks for stakeholder engagement and capacity-building initiatives to enhance the involvement of parents and local leaders in school governance.

The moderate positive relationship identified between stakeholder engagement policy and access to basic education in Port Harcourt Metropolis underscores the significant role that stakeholders especially parents, community leaders, and education boards – play in enhancing access to education.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study concluded that gender-sensitive education policy and stakeholder engagement policy significantly relate to and influence access to basic education in public junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. Schools that adopt gender-responsive practices and actively involve stakeholders experience higher enrolment, reduced dropout, and improved participation among learners.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made by the researcher:

1. Education policymakers should develop and enforce gender-sensitive education policies that promote safe learning environments for all

genders. This includes addressing issues such as gender-based violence, menstrual hygiene, and cultural biases, which often discourage girls from attending school regularly.

Government and school administrators should promote active stakeholder engagement by involving parents, community leaders, NGOs, and education boards in school planning, decision-making, and monitoring.

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