

Research Article

Assessing Gender Equality in the Provision of Educational Opportunities: A Case Study in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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Abstract

The education act of 2004 outlines Sierra Leone's education system, including primary, junior, senior, and tertiary education. The education sector plan 2018-2020 aims to increase access to education for all, including PWDs. The medium-term development plan 2019-2023 prioritizes human capital development. The national policy on radical inclusion targets girls, PWDs, and marginalized children, addressing high rates of adolescent pregnancy, child marriage, poverty, and equal opportunities. The policy requires initial sensitization, training, and benchmarking progress. The study evaluates gender equality and radical inclusion policies in Sierra Leone's education using qualitative research methods like interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The descriptive design, involving both primary and secondary sources, ensures comprehensive understanding and applicability to the entire population. The study found that poverty, inadequate school infrastructure, lack of toilets, special rooms for mature girls, long distances from home to school, and lack of sex education are the main factors influencing gender inequalities in education in selected schools. Additionally, 36% of respondents identified sexual harassment with peers/teachers as a significant factor, while 47% agreed with the statement that family responsibility also influences gender inequality. The majority of respondents agreed that the lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities is a challenge in implementing the national policy on radical inclusion in schools. Cultural beliefs and practices also pose a challenge, with 76% agreeing that these factors constrain effective teaching and learning in most sampled schools. Additionally, 70% of respondents agreed that the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy is a significant challenge in achieving inclusive education in Sierra Leone.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Equality, National Policy, Radical Inclusion, Educational Opportunities.

1.0. Introduction

The education act of 2004 outlines the structure of Sierra Leone's education system, including six years of primary schooling, three years of junior secondary schooling, three years of senior secondary schooling, and four years of tertiary/university undergraduate education (Lamin, 2020). The education sector plan 2018-2020 aims to increase equitable access to basic, senior and higher education for all including PWDs. The medium-term development plan 2019-2023 prioritizes human capital development through free education, access to quality healthcare, and food security. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) has developed the national policy on radical inclusion targeting girls, PWDs, and marginalized children. The Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy in Sierra Leone aims to improve the academic performance of secondary school students in external examinations against which backdrop the radical inclusion policy was established (Vibbi and Mohammed, 2022).

Secondary education is the third level of education, lasting six years after successful completion of primary school education. The policy was commissioned by President Julius Maada Bio in 2018, promising free education from pre-primary, junior secondary, senior secondary school, and all external examinations. The national policy on radical inclusion in schools is the first attempt by any government in Sierra Leone to provide a roadmap for the day-to-day operations of schools and the ministry of basic and senior secondary

education to ensure inclusion and positive experience for all students regardless of their status in society (Barrie, 2022). Radical inclusion means that these silent exclusionary policies, moral stances, formally stated actions, institutional regulations, national laws, and systemic frameworks should be removed intentionally and with urgency to achieve inclusion (Shojo, 2022).

Radical inclusion, as defined by the minister of basic and senior secondary education, is “the intentional inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society or institutions (Sengeh and Ordu, 2023). Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Sierra Leone are among the highest globally, and UNICEF cites that over the next decade, as many as 13 million more girls could be forced into early marriage by economically struggling parents (Blake, 2021). The radical inclusion policy, poverty, as one of the greatest barriers to education in Sierra Leone, has often left girls the most affected, involving issues of transactional sex, early marriage, and the burden on them as caregivers with the heavy load of supporting their families (Rose *et al.*, 2019). The policy has therefore been informed by insights from dialogue with constituencies across Sierra Leone; Kristof (2023)-including families, communities, teachers, and pupils-that have been finding ways to push back against destructive norms and policies and to imagine ways for pregnant and parent pupils to continue to learn, grow and prosper, and for children with disabilities, those from poor backgrounds, and those living in rural remote communities to enjoy the same educational facilities as their well-off, able-bodied, urban-dwelling counterparts (van der Veen and Datzberger, 2022). The policy particularly emphasizes the inclusion of historically marginalized groups: pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families. According to purposeful, this policy sets out to support access to sexual and reproductive health services, including the provision of sex education at school and in the community, and engage communities in ways schools can support all learners (Vibbi and Mohammed, 2022).

The radical inclusion policy in schools is a combination of two frameworks on inclusive education for children with disabilities and radical education for pregnant and parent learners (Higgins and Novelli, 2020). The purposeful report concluded that to compensate for the chronic neglect of female education, this policy encourages positive discrimination in favor of girls and provides measures that aim for greater equality by supporting them so they also can have access to the same opportunities as others in the community (Phoray-Musa, 2022). Despite an increase in school attendance among pregnant girls, the stigma, discrimination, and a lack of integration for pregnant and parent learners remain a barrier to their full participation in school. It calls for a meaningful and timely allocation and efficient use of resources to create a society in which both girls and boys are given equitable and appropriate support to access school and continue learning irrespective of their situation or socioeconomic and other status.

Considering the challenges faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools, the implementation of the policy will involve an initial sensitization and training process in schools, followed by the introduction of criteria that reflect radical inclusion in all school census and data collection programs, as well as benchmarking and tracking the progress of these targeted groups of marginalized children (Sawhney, 2015). Benchmarks and criteria need to continually be developed to understand the indicators regarding the quality of education and review and augment the existing policy (Moodley, 2017). Its importance stems from its focus on how people living with disabilities can have equal access to education and educational resources like any other person who has no disabilities in society. These challenges include the poor level of infrastructure that makes it difficult for people living with disabilities to access some areas; discrimination regarding employment opportunities and women with disabilities experience more discrimination in this area; economic exclusion or marginalization which is based on the impression that people living with disabilities cannot contribute meaningfully to the economy; inadequate physical power or energy to wade off sexual advances from sexual predators; grinding poverty; restrictions on access to information and so on. While some forms of disabilities may not necessarily alter the living conditions of people, some do make people invalid, relying on other people to live a proper life.

As stated by Antwi (2023), disabilities are part of human conditions, and it is expected that many people will experience some physical disabilities or impairments in their bodies during their lifetime (Akala, 2021). So, individuals with disabilities are believed to be better, not just with education but inclusive education that allows them to access the same level of education and educational facilities as their counterparts. However, it is hoped that the challenges of people living with disabilities can be reduced through inclusive education. Brinkmann (2016) highlighted some of the challenges bedeviling people living with disabilities. Disability somewhat limits what people living with disabilities can do and the places they can go to. For inclusion,

every institution would be required to make financial provisions for providing facilities like lifts, ramps, barrier-free classrooms, toilets, etc.

Oke and Fernandes (2020) stated that technology could be used in the form of motion sensors to open doors, flush toilets, and automatic door buttons for easier access through doors. So, if all teachers do not have proper skills and positive attitudes towards learners with special needs, it is unlikely that these children will receive satisfactory education. At present, training for teachers is fragmented, uncoordinated, and inadequate taking place in a segregated manner i.e. one for special children and another for students with general capabilities. Sometimes non-availability of a school or its location in an area that cannot be accessed becomes the major barrier for disabled children to get an inclusion education. Wall (2010) stated that teachers' training, abilities, and attitudes can be major limitations for inclusive education. Financial resources would also be required to train and retrain faculty to teach persons with disabilities in an inclusive environment.

1.1. Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.1.1. Aim of the Study

This study aims to assess gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities.

1.1.2. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives include:

- 1) To determine the factors that contribute to gender inequality in education in selected schools.
- 2) To identify the challenges faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools.

2.0. Materials and Methods

The methodology for evaluating gender equality and radical inclusion policies in education in Sierra Leone involves using qualitative research designs such as interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis. These methods enable researchers to gather in-depth data from various perspectives and develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The study employed a descriptive research design, utilizing a partial survey and qualitative data collection methods. This approach was chosen for its applicability to the entire population, time-saving nature, and cost-effectiveness. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources, with primary data allowing for personal contact and interviews with respondents, while secondary data focused on theoretical insights and literature from other authors.

Among the main barriers as stated by Stoet and Geary (2018), child labor (especially domestic work), early marriage and pregnancy, armed conflicts—which affect girls and women in particular—poverty, the influence of religions on educational policy decisions, violent and dangerous school environments and, especially, discriminatory practices that are repeated in schools, reflecting ideological and cultural constructions, macho, patriarchal, heteronormative and heterosexist dominant in the societies, which violate a set of human rights, especially the right to a dignified life, free from violence and discrimination. Her study indicated that inequality in access to education in secondary schools is caused by various factors including poverty, inadequate school infrastructure such as hostels and dormitories, lack of toilets and special rooms for mature girls, long distance from home to school and lack of sex education and early pregnancies. As cited by Kabeer (2021) stated that education is a key strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment, yet millions of women around the world are denied access to education.

DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) acknowledge that Latin America and the Caribbean countries have made substantive progress on gender parity in educational statistics, both in terms of access and school performance. According to Hausmann *et al.*, (2012), world education report research has shown a long-standing imbalance in participation in formal education by women. However, serious obstacles to the full realization of the human right to the education of girls and women go far beyond school access or the treatment they receive in schools. All these elements reveal that gender equality is still far from being fully accomplished, and the change in this scenario depends on a cultural transformation and the change of ingrained thoughts, what we understand will only become possible from reflection and a critical look at reality, elements that can and should be promoted in education and through it.

Women's participation in politics and public sector economic activities falls below that of their counterparts, often due to a lack of education for girls. Since education increases the opportunity cost of having a child by creating new opportunities that compete with childbearing and childcare, educated women tend to opt for

smaller families. Gender equality in education is directly proportional to gender equality in the labor force, in the household, and in decision-making. According to Wang and Degol (2017), beyond the educational field, there are other strong injustices against women: their reduced political representation and unequal salaries they receive, their almost exclusive responsibility for domestic work and the care of people, the criminalization of abortion and violence, once the rates of femicide in the region remain alarming.

A woman's lack of education also hurts the health and well-being of her children, especially where the primary responsibility for child-rearing and home-making lies with the mother. The economic repercussions of these inequalities are far-reaching, given the clear evidence that educated women invest more in their children and contribute to the welfare of the next generation (Alon *et al.*, 2020). For Kleven *et al.*, (2019), this situation is against international campaigns to widen women's access to education. Various international conventions have been passed concerning women's access to education. They include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UNESCO convention against Discrimination in Education (1962), the UN (1981) convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and the Millennium Development Goals (2000).

2.1. Study Area

The study was conducted in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, focusing on gender equality in educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Freetown is divided into three geographical areas and is located on the western peninsula of the country. It is an ideal research area due to its unique case study in qualitative research methods, including a radical inclusion policy aimed at promoting gender equality in schools. The city's diverse sociocultural aspects, such as cultural norms, traditional practices, and levels of poverty, can significantly influence girls' access to education and their experiences within the education system. Conducting qualitative research in Freetown requires an understanding of its social, cultural, and economic dynamics.

2.2. Study Population

The study's population includes educators, parents, teachers, and students in selected communities and schools in Freetown, with a focus on those with access, such as school administrators, teachers, students, educators, and parents. The study used random sampling techniques to gather data from 40 participants, comprising 15 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, 5 school administrators, 5 policymakers, and 5 community members were involved in developing targeted strategies to address the unique challenges faced by girls. The study explores Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policies and assesses gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities. By engaging with various stakeholders, including girls, parents, teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and community members, the study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender equality in girls' educational opportunities in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy. Additionally, researchers conducted a pilot study and an interactive process of data collection and analysis to determine sample size adequacy and assess data saturation, ensuring a thorough exploration and analysis of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling

2.3.1. Sampling Method

This study used a purposive sampling technique to sample 15 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, 5 school administrators, 5 policymakers, and 5 community members. We conducted a survey targeting local residents. A total of 40 participants to address specific challenges faced by female students in accessing quality education, including assessing gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities with a focus on Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy were selected.

Purposive sampling gave researchers the freedom to select participants to achieve high levels of validity and reliability. Gender equality in education is an important issue and requires extensive research to understand and address the unique challenges girls face. Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all, especially girls. Effectively assessing the impact of this directive may require targeted sampling. This section examines the rationale for using targeted sampling in a research study assessing gender equality in educational opportunities for girls in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy.

According to Winkler (2009), purposive sampling allows for a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific criteria related to the research question. In the context of understanding gender equality in educational opportunities, the use of targeted sampling in this study has

several justifications. Thomas and Bond (2015) emphasized that purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on specific groups or individuals who have unique knowledge and experience related to the research topic. By selecting participants who are directly involved in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policies or who are familiar with the experiences of girls in education, researchers can gain a broader and deeper understanding of the topic.

Through purposive sampling, researchers can target key informants who provide comprehensive and detailed information on gender equality in educational opportunities (Cherchas, 2014). This approach is particularly important when examining the experiences of vulnerable groups, such as girls in Sierra Leone, who may face particular barriers to education. By selecting participants who can offer diverse perspectives and experiences, researchers can obtain a broader range of information that is essential for comprehensive evaluations as adopted by Rogers (2013).

Ezeibekwe (2020) pointed out that Sierra Leone is a resource-constrained country with limited research resources. Given this, the researchers concluded that conducting large-scale random sampling studies may not be feasible due to logistical and budgetary constraints. Therefore, purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on the subset of the population that is most relevant to the research question. This approach helped us gain valuable insights into gender equality in girls' educational opportunities while making the most of available resources. The focus on purposive sample provided targeted and specific recommendations for policymakers and practitioners. By selecting participants with a direct interest in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policies, researchers can gain insights that are directly applicable to policy development and implementation.

This approach ensured that the research findings had practical implications and increased the likelihood of influencing positive change in achieving gender equality in education. In the context of assessing gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities to girls in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy, the use of targeted sampling provides a deep understanding, aims at specific information, and limits practical constraints may be justified by its ability to address and produce results. While random sampling techniques have advantages, purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on key informants and generate nuanced insights important for informing policy and practice (Hine, 2015).

2.3.2. Sample Size

This study used a purposive sampling technique to sample 15 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, 5 school administrators, 5 policymakers, and 5 community members who are engaged in developing targeted strategies that address the unique challenges faced by girls in accessing quality education a case study focusing on Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy and assessment of gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities. Gender equality in education is an important issue and requires extensive research to understand and address the unique challenges girls face. A total of 40 participants were selected to engage in the development of targeted strategies to address the unique challenges girls face in accessing quality education. Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all, especially girls.

2.4. Data Collection Methods

- a) **Interviews:** By conducting semi-structured interviews with stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents, and policymakers, researchers can elicit personal stories and insights about girls' experiences. These interviews may cover topics such as access to education, quality of education, cultural norms and practices, and perceptions of radical inclusion policies.
- b) **Focus Group Discussions:** By organizing focus group discussions with diverse groups including girls, boys, teachers, and community members, researchers can explore common perceptions and social dynamics regarding gender equality in education. These discussions provided valuable insights into barriers, challenges, and opportunities for girls.
- c) **Observation:** Researchers may observe classroom environments, school practices, and implementation of radical inclusion policies to better understand the lived experiences of girls in Sierra Leone's education system. Observing classrooms can reveal gender bias, discrimination, and overall inclusivity in the learning environment.
- d) **Document Analysis:** Analysis of policy documents, reports, and related literature on gender equality and radical inclusion policies in education provided a broader contextual understanding. Document analysis helps identify gaps between policy goals and implementation and provides insight into the effectiveness of policies to address gender inequalities in educational access.

2.4.1. Primary Data Collection Methods

Primary data was collected using interviews and field observations. This data collection method allows for the standardization and adoption of common information within a given population. During the interview process, the researcher pays very careful attention to better analyze what was collected during the interview and what information was obtained from her questionnaire. As questionnaires are generally self-reported, consideration was also given to ensuring respondent confidentiality and anonymity.

2.4.2. Secondary Data Collection Methods

Secondary methods of data collection are methods used to collect previous work that are easily accessible from other sources. This means that the information researcher's use has already been collected by scientists other than the researchers. Secondary data is derived from the work of various scientists and researchers and is therefore very useful for researchers in creating a theoretical framework and reviewing the literature. Secondary data sources that researchers use in their studies include textbooks, electronic journals, project documents, newspapers, published annual reports, and web-based literature. Secondary data is existing knowledge about the topic under investigation.

2.5. Data Presentation and Analysis

2.5.1. Data Presentation

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis were used to analyze the data collected using percentages, and charts for data collected through questionnaires, whereas a description of findings is used for data collected through interviews and data collected through observations. The collected data are analyzed in two different categories: empirical arguments and theoretical results. Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) program (Version 25.0) was used for data entry and analysis.

2.5.2. Data Analysis

Data analysis is a practice in which raw data is ordered and organized so that useful information can be extracted from it (Bengtsson, 2016). In this study, raw data took various forms including questionnaire responses, observations, interviews, focus groups discussions, and document analysis.

Textual write ups of data, charts, and graphs were used to analyze data. These methods were design to refine and distil the data so that readers can glean interesting information without needing to sort through all data on their own. Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to present and analyze the data that was collected. The service of a Statistician was sought during this phase of the study.

The raw data was presented in figures. Microsoft Excel was used to produce various figures. Comments were made on findings. Data from existing documents were analyzed to enable certain themes and trends to be defined. Descriptive statistics which include measures of central tendency and measures of dispersion were used to analyze data from observations. Using a variety of methods, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and advances related to gender equality in education.

The data analysis method was descriptive qualitative analysis and the quantitative data were triangulated using figures. Researchers can identify recurring themes related to gender inequality, access to education, cultural barriers, policy effectiveness, and the impact of radical inclusion policies on girls. By using qualitative research methods, we can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to achieve gender equality in education, not only in Sierra Leone but around the world. The collected quantitative data were coded and categorized according to the items of the semi-structured questionnaire using figures. Qualitative research methodologies provide a valuable approach to assessing gender equality in education, focusing primarily on girls' experiences.

3.0. Results and Analysis

3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. These collected data were useful to the researcher in elucidating the respondent's age category, respondent's education level, respondent's gender, current position, and length of time spent in the institution.

3.1.1. Ages of Respondents

Figure 1 displays the age categories of respondents.

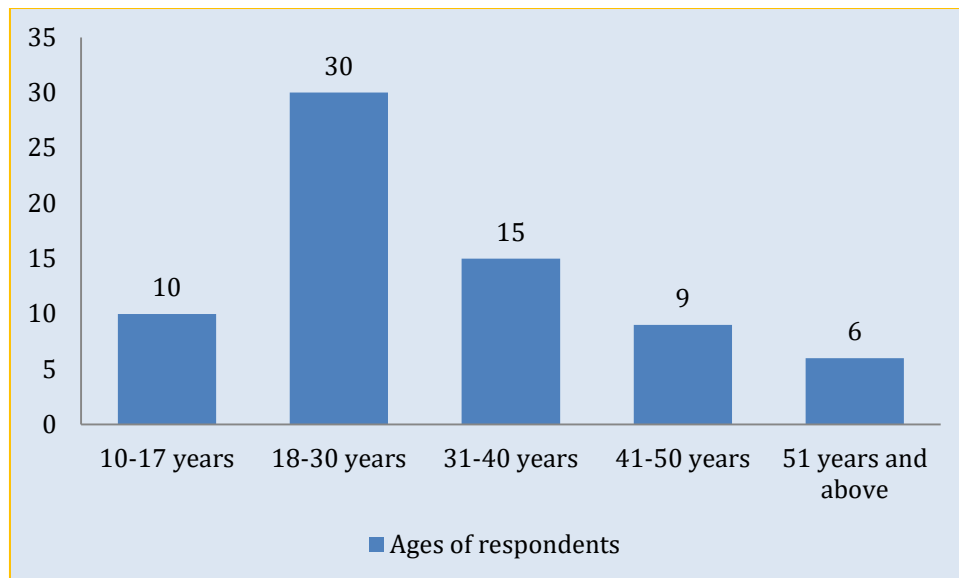


Figure 1. Ages of respondents.
(Source: Field research, 2023).

The results shown in Figure 1 shows that, the age of the respondents ranged from 10 years to over 51 years. The frequency of 10-17 years old is 10 accounting for 14% of the respondents. The frequency of 18-30 years old is 30 accounting for 43% of respondents, the age group of 31-40 is 15, and accounting for 21% of respondents, the frequency of the age group of 41-50 years old is 9 representing 13% of the respondents and the frequency of 51 and above is 6 accounting for 9% of the respondents. More respondents seemed to be between 18 years old and 40 years old, with a total frequency of 45 and respondents were 64%.

3.1.2 Gender of Respondents

The results of respondents’ gender status are presented in Figure 2.

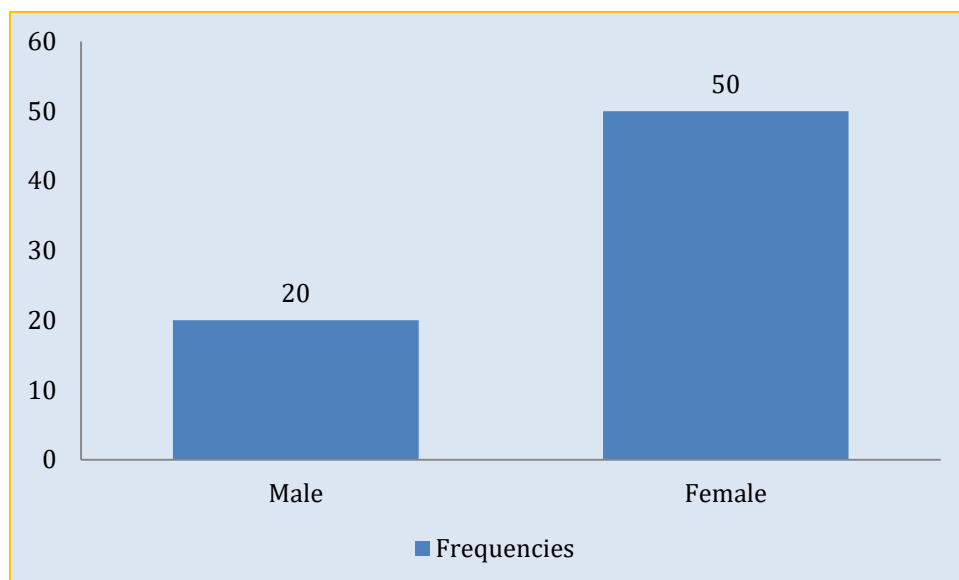


Figure 2. Gender of respondents.
(Source: Field research, 2023).

The result shown in Figure 2 shows the gender of the respondents. The gender category shows that there are 20 frequencies representing 29% of male respondents and 50 frequencies representing 71% of female respondents. This indicates that more female participants participated in the study. The researcher included both male and female respondents to obtain the opinions of both men and women about the phenomenon under study.

3.1.3. Respondents’ Level of Education

Results on the level of education of respondents are displayed in Figure 3.

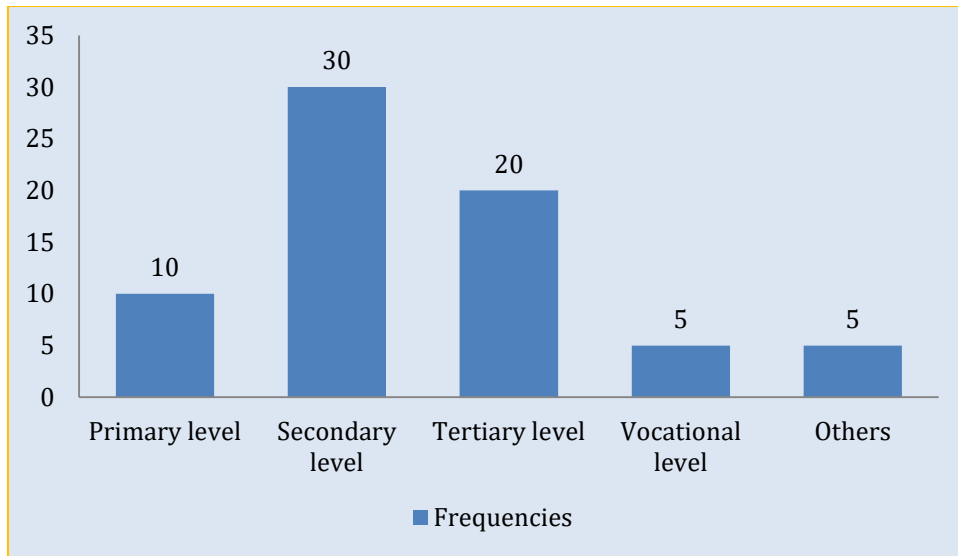


Figure 3. Respondents’ level of education.
(Source: Field research, 2023).

The education level of the respondents is in Figure 3 shows that the education level of the majority of the respondents falls into the secondary education category with the frequency of 30 accounting (43%) of respondents and the primary education category 10 accounting (14%) of the respondents, 20 respondents had tertiary education accounting (29%), 5 respondents had vocational training accounting (7%), and the number of respondents with qualifications such as diplomas or certificates was 5 accounting (7%) of the total number of respondents.

3.2. Factors That Influence Gender Inequality in Education in Selected Schools

The objective of this section is to identify factors that influence gender inequality in education in selected schools.

3.2.1. Poverty

Results on the statement “poverty as factor that influence gender inequalities in education in selected schools” are presented in Figure 4.

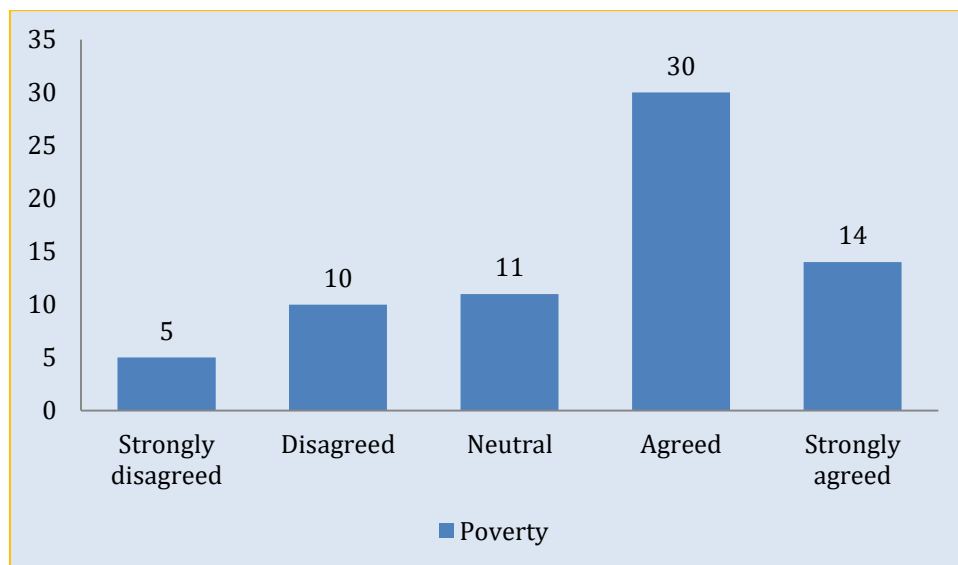


Figure 4. Poverty.
(Source: Field research, 2023).

The results in Figure 4 demonstrated that 14% of respondents representing frequencies of 10 disagreed with the statement that, poverty is a factor that influences gender inequalities in education in selected schools, and frequencies of 30 accounting for 43% of respondents agreed with the statement, whilst 11 respondents accounting for 16% of respondents have a neutral position on the statement.

3.2.2. School Based Factors That Influence Gender Inequality

Responses of respondents on statement “school based factors that influence gender inequality” are demonstrated in Figure 5.

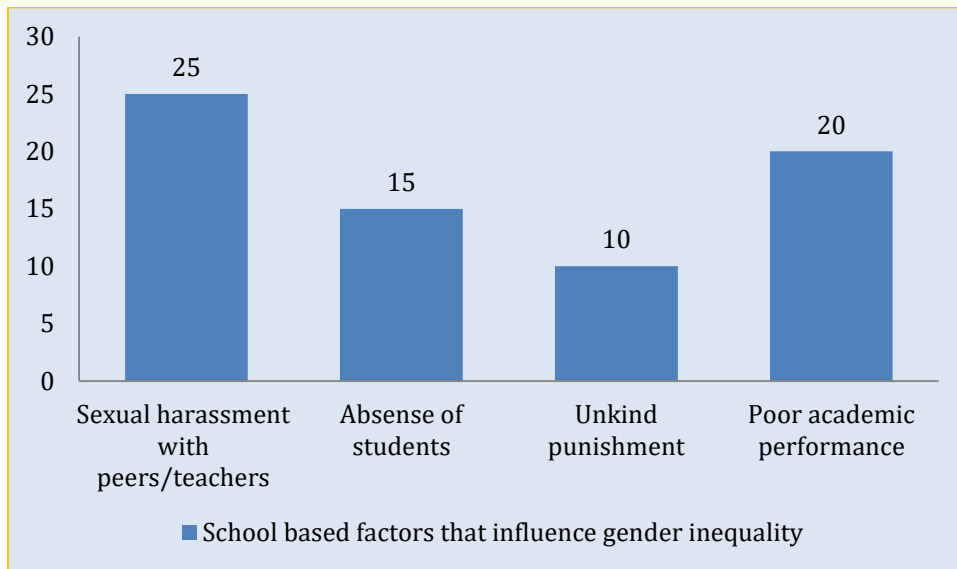


Figure 5. School based factors that influence gender inequality. (Source: Field research, 2023).

The findings in Figure 5 indicate that 25 frequencies accounting for 36% of respondents identified sexual harassment with peers/teachers as school-based factors that influence gender inequality, 15 frequencies representing 21% identified the absence of students as school-based factors that influence gender inequality, and 10 in frequencies accounting for 14% identified unkind punishment as school-based factors that influence gender inequality, whilst 20 in frequencies accounting for 29% of respondents identified poor academic performance as school-based factors that influence gender inequality. The results indicate that though the results are almost equally divided among the identified school-based factors that influence gender inequality, it seems that sexual harassment with peers/teachers is top among the identified factors. The results support the views of Linda (2014) that sexual harassment of girls by male teachers and community members, bad socio-cultural practices such as early and forced marriage, dowry, and polygamy practices prevent hundreds of girls in Freetown from accessing education.

3.2.3. Family Responsibility

Responses of respondents on the statement “family responsibility” as factor that influence gender inequality in education in selected schools are demonstrated in Figure 6.

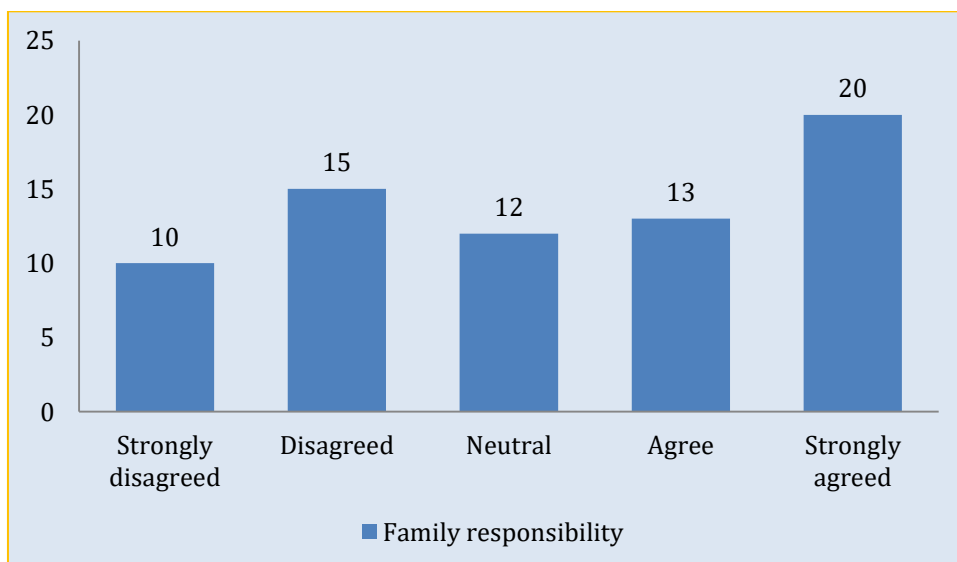


Figure 6. Family responsibility. (Source: Field research, 2023).

Figure 6 demonstrated that 25 representing 36% of respondents disagreed with the statement that family responsibility is a factor that influences gender inequality in education in selected schools, 33 frequencies accounting for 47% of respondents agreed with the statement, and 12 frequencies accounting for 17% of respondents were undecided on the statement that family responsibility is a factor that influences gender inequality in education in selected schools.

3.3. Challenges Face in the Implementation of the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools

The objective of this section is to identify that challenges face in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools.

3.3.1. Lack of Classrooms to Increase Access to Safe and Adequate Learning Facilities

Responses of respondents on the statement on the lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities are presented in Figure 7.

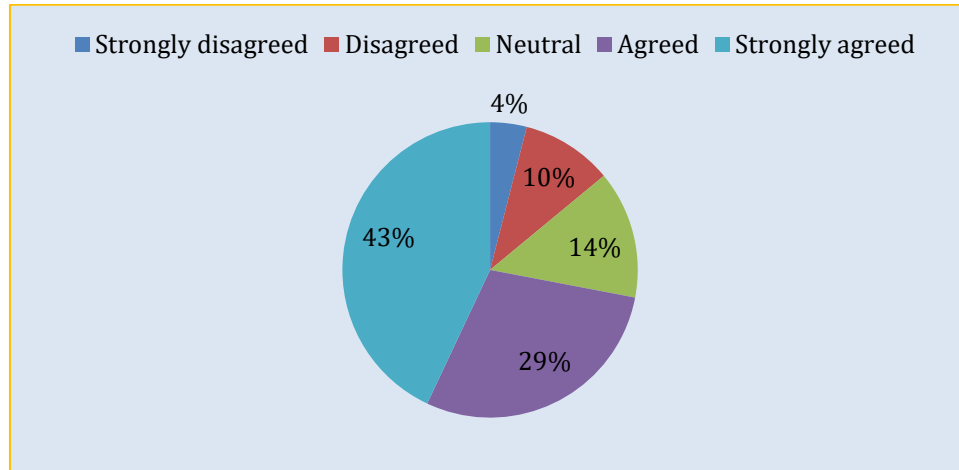


Figure 7. Lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities. (Source: Field research, 2023).

The findings in Figure 7 demonstrate that 14% of respondents disagreed with the statement that the lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools. These findings illustrate that the majority of the respondents 72% are in agreement that the lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools. 14% of the respondents remain neutral.

3.3.2. Cultural Beliefs and Practices Pose a Challenge to the Implementation of Radical Inclusion Policy

Responses of respondents on the statement "cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy" are presented in Figure 8.

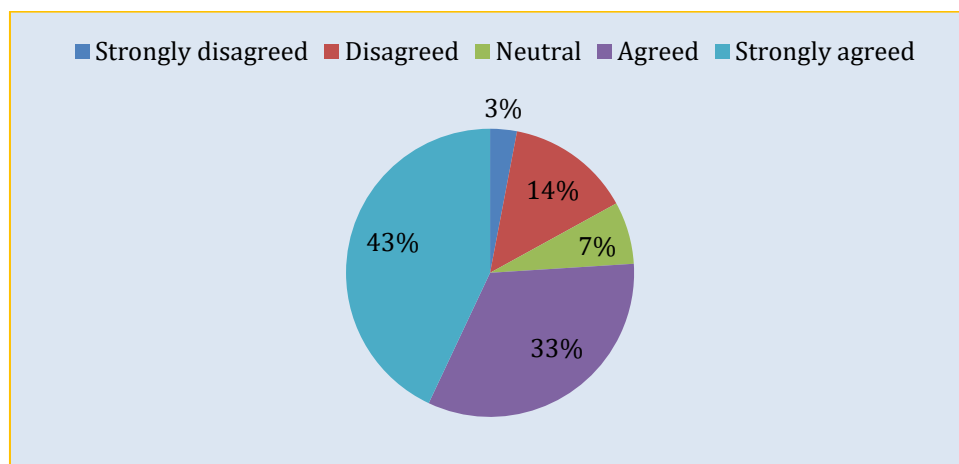


Figure 8. Cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy. (Source: Field research, 2023).

The results presented in Figure 8 show that 12 frequencies representing 17% of respondents disagreed with the statement that cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy. Also, respondents who agreed with the statement are 53 representing 76%, and equally so few respondents 5 in frequencies representing 7% hold a neutral view on the statement.

3.3.3 Lack of Proper Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy

Results from respondents on the statement “lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy” are presented in Figure 9.

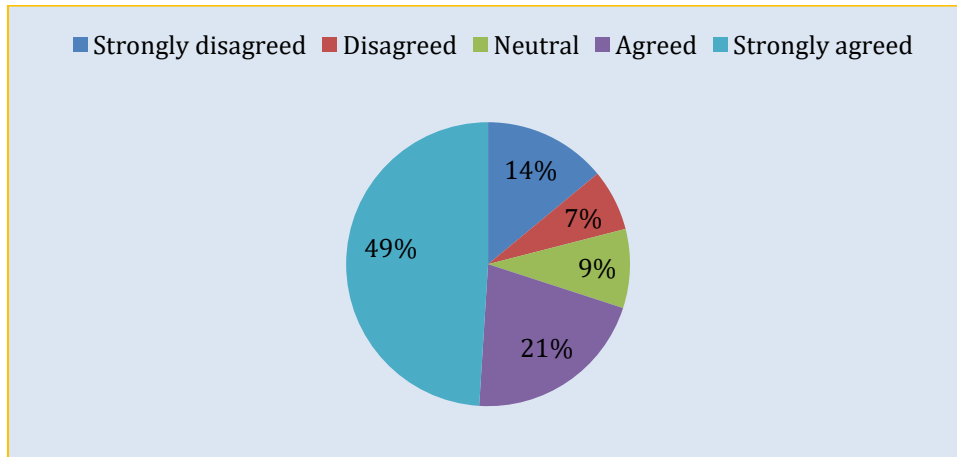


Figure 9. Lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy.
(Source: Field research, 2023).

The results in Figure 9 show that 21% of respondents representing frequencies of 15 disagreed with the statement that the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools, and frequencies of 49 accounting 70% of respondents agreed with the statement, while 6 respondents representing 9% of respondents have no position on the statement. These results illustrate that the majority of the respondents are in agreement that lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools.

4.0. Discussion

According to findings on responses of respondent to the statement, poverty as a factor that influences gender inequalities in education in selected schools presented in Figure 4 imply that 63% of respondents agreed with the statement. These results are consistent with the views of Linda (2014) that inequality in access to education in Freetown secondary schools is caused by various factors including poverty, inadequate school infrastructure such as hostels and dormitories, lack of toilets and special room for mature girls, long distance from home to school and lack of sex education and early pregnancies. Also, according to the findings in Figure 5 on the statement school-based factors that influence gender inequality show that among all the factors identified 36% of respondents identified sexual harassment with peers/teachers as school-based factors that influence gender inequality. The results indicate that though the results are almost equally divided among the identified school-based factors that influence gender inequality, it seems that sexual harassment with peers/teachers is top among the identified factors. The results support the views of Linda (2014) that sexual harassment of girls by male teachers and community members, and bad socio-cultural practices such as early and forced marriage, dowry, and polygamy practices prevent hundreds of girls from accessing education. Again, the results of the statement family responsibility as a factor that influence gender inequality in education in selected schools illustrated in Figure 6 show that 47% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Furthermore, findings on the challenges face in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools, the first statement under this section is on the lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities. The results in Figure 7, 72% of respondents tend to agree with the statement. These findings illustrated that majority of the respondents are in agreement that lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities is a challenge face in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools. These findings support the research of Mwangi and Orodho (2014) that on the challenges of inclusive education they find out that physical and critical teaching learning

resources were either inadequate or were quite dilapidated. Similarly, responses of respondents on the statement “cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy” presented in Figure 8, show that 76% of respondents agreed with the statement. The findings illustrate that a huge majority of respondents agreed with the statement that cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy.

These findings are in line with the research of Mwangi and Orodho (2014) that there were several socio-economic and cultural variables that constrain effective teaching and learning in most sampled schools in the bid of implementing the inclusive education in Kenya. Also, results from respondents on the statement “lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy” presented in Figure 9, indicate that 70% of respondents agreed with the statement. These results illustrate that a majority of the respondents are in agreement that lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools.

5.0. Conclusion

Conclusions drawn from findings indicated that inequality in access to education in Freetown secondary schools is caused by various factors including poverty, inadequate school infrastructure such as hostels and dormitories, lack of toilets and special room for mature girls, long distance from home to school and lack of sex education and early pregnancies. Also, results indicated that among the identified school-based factors that influence gender inequality, it seems that sexual harassment with peers/teachers is top among the identified factors. It is again revealed that family responsibility as a factor that influences gender inequality in education in selected schools. Moreover, findings illustrated that a majority of the respondents are in agreement that lack of classrooms to increase access to safe and adequate learning facilities is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools. Furthermore, cultural beliefs and practices pose a challenge to the implementation of radical inclusion policy. According to the study, the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of the policy is a challenge faced in the implementation of the national policy on radical inclusion in schools.

6.0. Recommendations

Based on the research findings the following recommendations are made:

- ✓ Government is needed to support students’ specifically vulnerable girls in affording school fees, transport costs, school uniforms and learning materials to enable girls from poor families to access secondary education without barriers while at schools. This is true because it was observed from study that poverty limit girls’ access to education and therefore it is a pressing call to government to support vulnerable girls.
- ✓ Stakeholders in education sector should closely monitor the gender balance targets, analyze the obstructions and take corrective action to nurture a gender sensitive culture in the policy.
- ✓ The government prioritizes investment in education and develops policies to improve the financing of education in such a way as to provide adequate educational facilities for all schools to eliminate the long-existing gender and spatial inequalities.
- ✓ The government to reform the laws completely, ban corporal punishment in schools, and exercise the political will to implement the existing laws that defend and protect women and adolescent girls from the risk of gender violence and discrimination which threaten their wellbeing and dignity and life opportunities.

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