

STATE OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE

Vol. 1

Antecedent Factors Related to the State of
Girl Child Education Among Public Secondary
Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria



FOREWORD

Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for transforming societies and ensuring sustainable development. In particular, the education of the Girl Child has proven to be a cornerstone for progress, not only for the individual but for families. It is against this backdrop that I wholeheartedly commend the effort of Onelife Initiative in producing this vital report titled “The Antecedent Factors Related to the State of Girls’ Education in Akwa Ibom State”.

This report comes at a critical time when our state and indeed the nation are seeking practical data-driven strategies to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all. The findings contained in this document reveal not just the challenges girls are facing in accessing cultural and economic barriers to infrastructure and policy-related limitations but also highlight opportunities for innovation, reform and collaboration.

As the Honourable Commissioner for Education, I acknowledge the importance of confronting these realities with honesty, empathy, and resolve. We cannot build a prosperous society when a significant portion of our population is denied access to qualitative education and contribution to national development simply because of their gender. The advancement of girls' education must therefore remain a top priority in our educational policy agenda. This report offers recommendations that align with the goals of the Ministry of Education in Akwa Ibom State, especially in our drive to promote gender equity, reduce dropout rates, improve school infrastructure, and empower educators. Its depth and clarity will undoubtedly enrich our decision-making process and help us target interventions more efficiently.

I applaud Onelife Initiative and their partner, Malala Fund for their dedication to youth development and gender inclusion. Their work reminds us that sustainable change is only possible when civil society, government and community actors work together with a shared vision. I encourage all stakeholders, policy makers, school administrators, teachers, parents and community leaders to take this report seriously. Let it inspire action, let it guide investments, and most importantly, let it lead us to a future where every girl in Akwa Ibom State has not only the right but also the means to complete her education and fulfil her potential.

It is with great honour that I endorse this report and assure the public of the Ministry's commitment to ensuring its recommendation.

Prof. Ubong Essien Umoh

Honourable Commissioner
Ministry of Education,
Akwa Ibom State.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 100-page report by Onelife Initiative with support from Malala Fund presents a comprehensive assessment of the State of Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State in the period of the research, covering 2023 to 2024. The study was undertaken following ethical approval to identify the key challenges and opportunities within the education sector as it relates to girls in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom and to propose actionable recommendations for stakeholders to enhance educational outcomes for girls in the State.

This Girls' Education Report would not have been possible without the approval and support of the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education. We commenced this project under the leadership of the previous Commissioner of Education. The Ministry has provided immense support for our work on Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State, and we deeply appreciate the current Commissioner of Education, Professor Ubong Essien Umoh, for his support and guidance. Special thanks also to the Permanent Secretaries, Directors of Education, school administrators, non-governmental organisations, community leaders, parents, teachers, non-teaching staff, education experts, school principals and the female students who participated in the data-gathering process.

The study involved a total of 83 in-depth interviews and 36 Focus Group Discussions with key education stakeholders, including teachers, government officials, community leaders, female students and parents, comprising 1,272 participants. These interviews were conducted across 9 local government areas in Akwa Ibom State,

spread across the 3 Senatorial districts. Qualitatively, we see the need for deeper intervention in girls' education in Uyo, Oron, and Abak Local Government Areas compared to other LGAs in the State. From the data presented to us at Onelife Initiative from West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), **we see a clearer need for improving the quality of girls' education in the following LGAs — Uyo, Abak and Oron. In Uyo LGA, 71.7% of girls who sat for the 2022 WASSCE failed to get 5 credits in Mathematics, English and 3 other subjects. This means 1,164 girls failed the exams in Uyo Local Government. In Oron Local Government, 57.4% representing 278 girls, failed the external examination. In Abak Local Government, out of the 988 girls who sat for the exams, 540 girls failed. The WASSCE results for other years — 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 are detailed in the body of the report.**

Data from the Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education, received in 2024, revealed that there are 270 public junior and senior secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, including Community Secondary School, Nkari, in Ini Local Government Area, which is currently closed due to a protracted communal clash. Of this number, 265 are stand-alone junior secondary schools and 5 are junior secondary schools. Akwa Ibom has 7 girls-only secondary schools and one boys-only secondary school. Across the state, there are a total of 188,197 students in the public junior secondary schools, with 53% of them being girls. In the senior class, there are 175,302 students, and 54% of them are girls. A total of 7,256 teachers are in the state government employment, representing a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:51 at the

secondary education level, and 56% of these teachers are female, delivering teaching and learning services to the total estimated population of 370,580 secondary school students. Some of our recommendations in this report include the sustenance of in-school programmes that promote peer support, mentorship, and counselling services to address the socio-emotional needs of girls; continuous trainings on gender sensitivity and understanding the specific needs of girls; incorporating comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula to empower girls with knowledge and skills to make informed reproductive health decisions. Others include promotion of Initiatives such as community awareness campaigns, parental education sessions, and school-community partnerships can foster a supportive environment for girls; adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities are also critical to keeping girls in school, especially during menstruation.

We hope our findings will help point various actors keen on improving the lot of the girl child in the right direction. In this report, we captured the various antecedent factors that affect the State of Girl Child education in the state. We are also grateful for the consultancy support we received from Mrs Dorcas Famoyegun on this report. This report would not have been possible without the unwavering support of our partner, Malala Fund, which continues to tirelessly invest in girls' education programmes to help girls attend school and reach their full potential.





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Ifiok ok'pon A'kan Imo
Knowledge is Greater
than Wealth

INTRODUCTION

Study Background

The girl-child is a biological female offspring from birth to 18 years of age. A responsible adult, such as her parents, guardians, or older siblings, is in complete charge of the young girl at this time. In addition, the girl-child is malleable throughout this time as she grows and develops her character and individuality (Mboho, 2024). If girls are not offered high-quality education, any society's development will be widely unbalanced. Ordinarily, society accepts education as a means of achieving male and female authority, prestige, greatness, survival, and advancement. Studies have highlighted the fact that girls are denied the necessary competencies for community development because they face discrimination in their education and are married off at a young age (Mboho, 2024).



Girls' education has a significant positive impact on society as a whole. Girl child education is critical for promoting gender equality, empowerment, and economic growth (World Bank, 2018). An educated girl is more likely to delay marriage, participate in the workforce, and contribute to the economic prosperity of her community (Ferguson and Dickens, 2003). Additionally, education gives females the information and abilities they need to make wise decisions regarding their health and wellbeing, which can improve things for coming generations. Despite these advantages, sociocultural, economic, and infrastructure considerations still pose major barriers for girls seeking an education in many parts of Nigeria. These factors may include socio-cultural norms, economic conditions, access to schools, family background, teacher quality, and school infrastructure (Bolaji, 2014, Okpon et al., 2020).

Globally, efforts have been made to promote gender equality in education through initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all by 2030. Goal 5 also emphasises empowering all women and girls and attaining gender equality. Even while overall enrollment rates have increased significantly, there are still gaps, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where females' education is still hindered by cultural norms and economic difficulties. Girl child education has since grown to be a serious concern in the majority of developing nations today, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where many young girls do not attend school.

To overcome these inequities, Nigeria has implemented a number of policies and programmes. The Nigerian government has implemented policies like the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and the Girls' Education Project (GEP) to promote gender equality in education (FMoH, 2004). All Nigerian children have the right to formal education irrespective of their sex. However, the implementation of these policies has been inconsistent, and the desired outcomes have not been fully achieved (Oladimeji, 2020). The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, launched in 1999, aimed to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the junior secondary level. Gender differences in education, however, continue despite these efforts. The Nigerian government's commitment to international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), further underscores the need to address these challenges comprehensively.

In addition to being a child's right, universal access to high-quality basic education provides all school-age children with an equal opportunity to reach their desired level of development and functionality in society, regardless of social-economic, geographic, physical, gender, or class limitations (Eddy & Akpan, 2009). The issue of uneven access to high-quality instruction for younger students and uneven growth in school enrollment among local schools arises when more schools are established in some regions than others, when some schools are better equipped than others in a given location, and when some areas of a state are given more educational opportunities than others (Okpon et al., 2020). This disproportionate tendency in school attendance appears to be widespread in Nigeria, where there are few, poor schools in rural areas and more high-quality schools concentrated in the country's metropolis. Compared to their rural counterparts, who are likely to have poor quality instruction and limited access, this tends to provide greater opportunity for children in urban regions to receive a decent education.

Even though Akwa Ibom State has dedicated a significant amount of resources to guaranteeing adequate access to basic education through the full implementation of Universal Basic Education since 2008 (AKSSEB, 2018), the issue of inequality in access to basic education appears to persist despite the state's trend towards increasing school enrolment (Ukpong, 2017). It has been noted that schools with excellent facilities—classrooms, libraries, labs, and enough teachers—are typically located in urban regions and other key locations where stakeholders are highly engaged and concentrated (Arop, Ekpang, & Owan, 2018). Additionally, it should be highlighted that the majority of rural schools lack contemporary libraries and labs, suitable classroom seating, enough teachers, particularly in important subject areas like Mathematics, English and Basic Technology (Ekaette et al., 2019; Owan, et al, 2019).

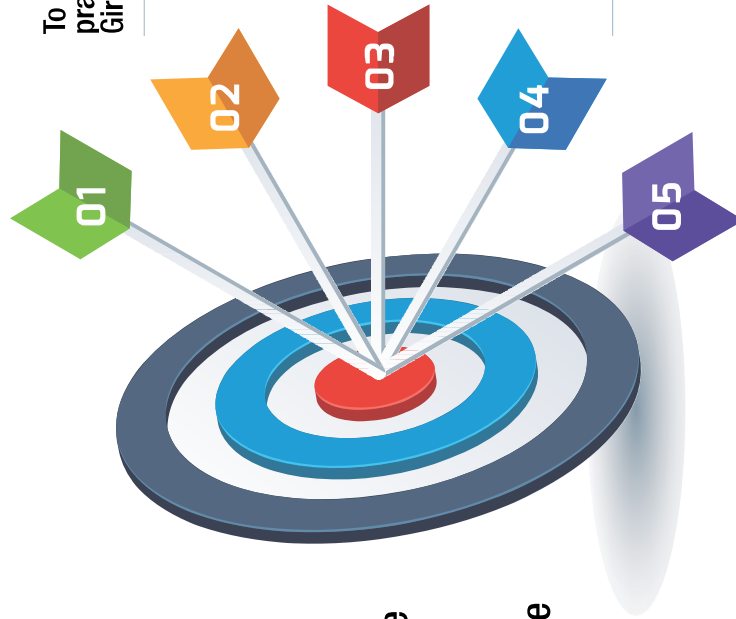
This study holds significant importance for several reasons. First, it contributes to the body of knowledge on gender disparities in education, providing insights into the specific challenges faced by girls in Akwa Ibom State. Second, the findings will inform policymakers, educators, and NGOs about the critical areas that need attention to enhance girl child education. Third, by identifying effective strategies and interventions, the study aims to support the development of policies and programs that promote gender equality in education, thereby contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the region.



RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim

of this research was to investigate the Antecedent Factors related to the State of Girl Child Education among Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State



To examine the perceptions, attitudes and practices of education stakeholders towards Girl Child Education in Akwa-Ibom State

Examine the perceptions of female secondary school students towards the quality of education they receive

Assess the condition of education available for the girls in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State

Describe the academic situation of the girl child in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State

Identify the factors influencing Girl Child Education among Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

- 1 What are the perceptions, attitudes and practices of education stakeholders towards Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State?
- 2 What are the perceptions of female secondary school students towards the quality of education they receive?
- 3 What is the quality of education available for the girls in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State?
- 4 What is the academic situation of the girl child in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State?
- 5 What are the factors influencing Girl Child Education among Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State?



Theoretical Model

The ecological model proposed by McLeroy (1988) was used to present the study outcomes. The ecological model is a framework that examines the various levels of influence on an individual's behaviour and development, including girl child education. The model consists of five constructs: intra-personal factors (individual characteristics, skills, and abilities); inter-personal factors (relationships and interactions with family, peers, and teachers); community factors (social norms, resources, and support systems); institutional factors (school environment, policies, and programs); and public policies (laws, regulations, and funding allocations). These constructs interact and influence one another, shaping the opportunities and outcomes for girl child education. By considering all levels, the ecological model provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that promote or hinder girl child education, enabling the development of effective strategies for improvement.



Fig. 1: Ecological Model for the Classification of Factors Influencing Girl Child Education

Owo Mi'maha Ifiok, Nka
E'sie Kakan

Whoever is slow to learn will be
left behind

METHODS

Study Design and Scope

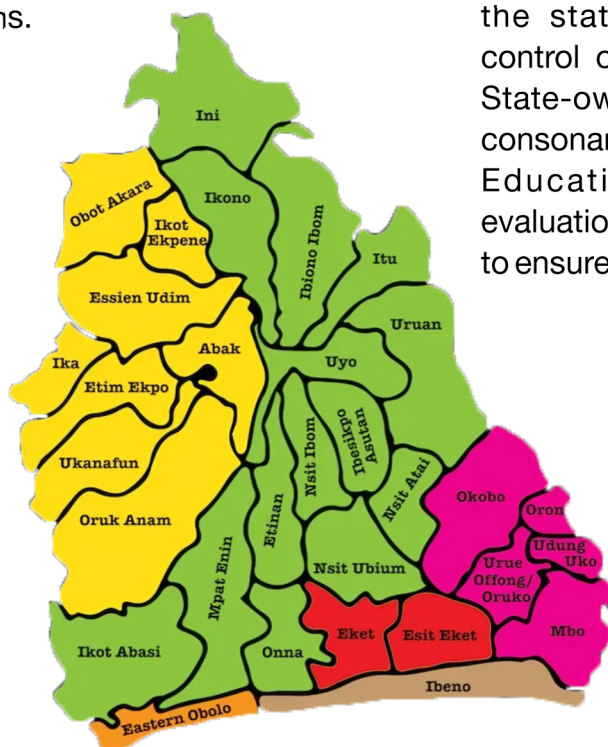
This research was a mixed-study with qualitative and quantitative components. The cross-sectional survey was done using questionnaires and observational checklists while the qualitative components were completed using focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth interviews (IDI) and key informant interviews (KII). While the interviews provided a deeper understanding of the themes and themes gleaned from the survey, the cross-sectional survey provided a view of the current situation (Eyisi, 2016). The observational checklist was also used to confirm and substantiate the information collected.



Description of Study Area

Akwa Ibom is a state in Nigeria. It is located in the coastal southern part of the country, lying between latitudes 4°32'N and 5°33'N, and longitudes 7°25'E and 8°25'E. The state is bordered on the east by Cross River State, on the west by Rivers State and Abia State, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean and the southernmost tip of Cross River State. Akwa Ibom has a population of over 5 million people. It was created in 1987 from the former Cross River State and is currently the highest oil and gas producing state in the country. The state's capital is Uyo, with over 1.2 million inhabitants. Akwa Ibom has over 1,011 primary schools, 738 secondary schools as at 2017 and 30 tertiary institutions.

In practice, Akwa Ibom's free education is 100% government funded with students paying absolutely no direct fees while the government funds the entire education machinery in the state from budgetary commitments of about 60,000,000 USD annually to the free education scheme. As part of the policy, the government pays subventions of 2 USD per student to 230 school principals and 0.75 USD per pupil to 1,110 primary school head teachers across the state to guard against back-door charges (aksgonline.com, 2011). The Akwa Ibom State Ministry of Education is the state government's ministry tasked with overseeing the education sector in the state, policy formulation and control over Primary, Secondary and State-owned Tertiary Institutions in consonance with the National Policy on Education, and monitoring and evaluation of educational programmes to ensure quality.



Study Population

The study population consisted of female students attending public secondary schools and stakeholders on Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State. The stakeholders included the following: School Administrators, Teachers, Corps Member, Non-teaching staff, Parents/Guardian, Education experts, Traditional leaders, Religious leaders, Community leaders, Representatives from Ministry of Education, State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), State Secondary School Education Board (SSEB), Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM), Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), National Teachers Institute (NTI), CSOs (Civil Society Organisations), Journalists, Parent Teachers Association (PTA), Old Student Association, Architects, and NSE (The Nigerian Society of Engineers)/COREN (Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria).



SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A multistage sampling method was employed in this study; it involved the following stages;



	URBAN	PERI-URBAN	RURAL
UYO	Uyo	Uruan	Nsit Ibom
	Community Comprehensive Secondary School, Four Towns (Junior and Senior)	Comprehensive High school, Idu Uruan (Junior and Senior)	Nsit Peoples Grammar School, Afaha Offiong (Junior and Senior)
	Adiaha Obong Secondary Commercial School (Junior and Senior)	Adiaha-obong secondary school, Ekpene Ukim (Junior and Senior)	Comprehensive secondary school, Edebom (Junior and Senior)
IKOT EKPENE	Ikot Ekpene	Ikono	Etim Ekpo
	State Commercial Secondary School, Okop Eto Road (Junior and Senior)	Ediene community secondary school, Ikot Ayan Ediene (Junior and Senior)	Ikono Annang Comprehensive High School, Nkwot Ikono (Junior and Senior)
	Goretti Girls Secondary Community School, Ikot Ekpene (Junior and Senior)	Ikono Girls Secondary schools, Itak Ikot Akpaden (Junior and Senior)	Community Secondary School, Eka Uruk Eshiet (Junior and Senior)
EKET	Eket	Okobo	Eastern Obolo
	Government Secondary School, Afaha Eket (Junior and Senior)	Eastern Okobo High school, Obufi (Junior and Senior)	Community Secondary School, Ikot Town (Junior and Senior)
	Girls' High School (Junior and Senior)	Union secondary school, Nsie (Junior and Senior)	Migrant Secondary School, Emereoke (Junior and Senior)

Table 1: School Selection

Sample Size Calculation

The sample size (n) for the quantitative study was determined using the Leslie Kish formula for single proportion for descriptive studies. A prevalence (p) of 50% was used in the calculation of the sample size.

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

n = minimum sample size

Z = Standard normal deviation set at 1.96 normal interval

p = prevalence, 0.05

q = proportions that does not have the characteristics being investigated (q=1-p),

q=1-0.05=0.05

d = Level of significance set at 0.05 (precision at 5%)

Therefore the sample size (n) = $\frac{(1.96)^2(0.05)(0.05)}{0.05 \times 0.05}$

$$n = 384.16 \approx 385$$

A 10% attrition rate was added 385+39= 424

Using a design effect of 3 based on the three clusters, the total sample size was 1,272

A total of 1,272 participants were recruited for the cross-sectional survey. After data cleaning, the data of 1,263 participants were used.

Sample Selection for In-depth Interviews

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the following stakeholders across Akwa-Ibom State. Two school administrators (One from a mixed school and another from girls only school) were selected from the selected LGAs giving a total of 18. Representatives of other stakeholder groups were interviewed.

S/N	Stakeholder Group	No. of Interviews
1.	School Administrators (Principal/Vice Principal)	18
2.	Parents/Guardian	2
3.	Education Expert	2
4.	State Ministry of Education Representative	2
5.	Federal Ministry of Education Representative	2
6.	Akwa Ibom SUBEB Representative	2
7.	SSEB Representative	2
8.	TESCOM Representative	2

9.	NUT Representative	2
10.	NTI Representative	2
11.	CSOs Representative	2
12.	Education Journalist	2
13.	PTA Representative	2
14.	Old Student Association Representative	2
15.	NSE/COREN Representative	2
16.	Traditional Leader	2
17.	Community Leader	2
18.	Religious Leader	2
19.	Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Welfare Representative	2
20.	Local Inspector of Education	2
21.	Zonal Inspector of Education	2
22.	Teachers	3*
23.	Corpors	3*
24.	Girl Child (Female Student)	3*
25.	Association of Retired Principals	2
26.	N-Power (N-Teach)	2
27.	After School Lessons	2
28.	Security Agencies	2
29.	Policy Makers/ State House of Assembly	2
30.	NURTW	2
31.	Health Practitioners in School Clinics	2
32.	RUWASA	2
33.	Min. of Environment Representative	2
		85

*1 per senatorial district

Table 2: Selection of Education Stakeholders

Sample Selection for Focus Group Discussions

Four FGDs were carried out in each LGA selected, two (2) for teaching staff and another two (2) for non-academic staff giving a total of 36 FGDs. Each FGD group was made up of 8 to 10 participants. The following is the sample profile of the FGD participants.

S/N	Group A (Teaching Staff)	Group B (Non-Teaching Staff)
1.	Teacher	Food vendors
2.	Corps Members	Gateman
3.	N-Teach	Cleaners

Table 3: Sample Profile of FGD Participants

For each selected LGA, the Junior and Senior schools were classified as a unit for the FGD. 50% of the participants were selected from the Junior school and the other half from the Senior school. Selection of FGD participants were done using purposive sampling to ensure a fair representation of the identified sample profile.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion

- Students that are currently enrolled in selected secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State
- Selected group of education stakeholders working in Akwa Ibom State

Exclusion

- Students who have completed or have not started secondary school
- Students schooling outside Akwa Ibom State
- Education stakeholders who have not worked in Akwa Ibom State

Data Collection Techniques

The survey data was collected using interviewer administered questionnaires. This was administered by the researcher and other research assistants. For four weeks, data were collected on weekdays from 9 am to 2 pm. Before distributing the questionnaire, the participants' consent was requested after being informed of the study's objectives, the time required to complete the questions, and the significance of the study. The completed questionnaire was examined for accuracy and completeness. Any omission or incomplete response in the questionnaire were brought to the respondent's attention. For the qualitative aspect, the interviews were conducted after the proposed participant had read the information sheet and had granted their consent. The interviews were done in a private place to reduce interference and for confidentiality.

Recruitment of Research Assistants, Validity and Reliability

Recruitment of Research Assistants

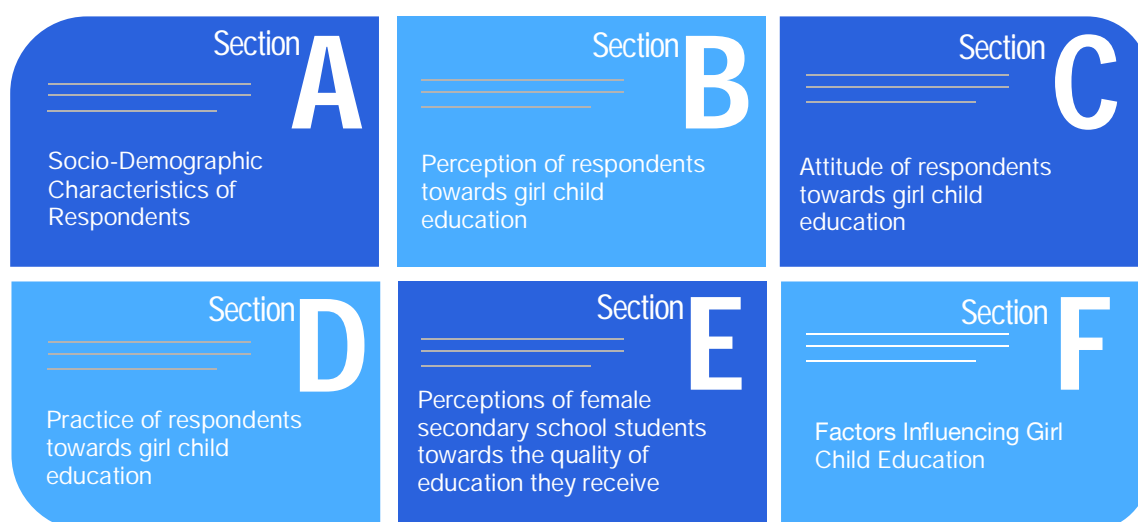
12 research assistants were recruited and trained on the ethics of the research and detailed knowledge of the research process was given to them.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The draft instruments were subjected to review and comments from other experts in the field. The instrument used was not pre-tested as the instrument had been pre-tested and deployed for utilisation under the project implemented in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Instruments for Data Collection

A questionnaire, interview guide, and observation checklist was used for data collection. The questionnaire is made of 6 sections. Details of each section includes as follows:



The questions for the interviews (IDIs and FGDs) were from the interview guides developed. The guide was made of 12 questions from which appropriate questions were selected based on the stakeholder to be interviewed. The observational checklist contained questions on infrastructure, human and material resources as well as school recording keeping. Physical observation was done in 25 selected schools across the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom state.

Data Analysis and Management

Each copy of the questionnaire had a serial number inscribed on it for quick identification and recall of any instruments with issues for accurate data entry and analysis. Each of the administered questionnaires was reviewed individually and revised for accuracy and completeness. After carefully examining the responses, a coding guide was created to make coding and data entry easier. For the entry of the coded data and analysis, a template was created on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 software.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The data was presented in tables and charts. The audio files were transcribed verbatim for the qualitative data, and the information was cleaned. After that, NVIVO was used to conduct a theme analysis. Prior to the coding, a coding guide was designed to provide a framework for analysis after reading the transcript.

Data Handling & Record Keeping

Data relating to the research were first collected manually through questionnaires and other softcopy recordings and then processed for analysis using passworded computers. Both the raw files and the processed data were stored electronically in the cloud with limited access. They were used solely for research purposes only.

Research Monitoring

The entire research process was monitored by the organisation's management and project team for quality control and to ensure there was no deviation from the purpose of the research and that all ethical considerations are complied with. The Child and Vulnerable Protection Policy of Onelife Initiative was also used to guide interactions with the children who were participants in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Akwa Ibom State Ethical Review Committee. For adolescents under the age of 18, the principals of their schools will grant permission, and the adolescents themselves gave assent. Informed consent was obtained from adults. Participants were made aware that participation is completely optional and that declining to take part will have no negative effects.

Study Limitations

The requirement that participants in this study be students or education stakeholders in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria places a restriction on the study's scope, the findings therefore cannot be generalised relatively beyond Akwa Ibom State's educational system.

RESULTS

Enyen Akpang u'tong
Akop Ifiok, A'se Kord ye' Ifiok

The child who is taught,
grows with understanding

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Girl Child

The quantitative aspect of the study surveyed 1,263 respondents, predominantly aged 13-15 years (61.1%), with other aged groups; 10-12 years (21.1%), 16-18 years (16.4%), and over 18 years (1.5%). The vast majority were Christians (98.4%), with a few practising Islam (0.4%) and traditional religions (1.2%). Ethnically, the sample was mainly Ibibio (91.3%), followed by Igbo (4.8%), Yoruba (3.5%), and Hausa (0.5%). Respondents were distributed across various school classes, with the highest numbers in SS2 (22.6%), JSS3 (21.1%), and SSS3 (18.2%). Most had two guardians or parents (71.4%), with females being the main guardians in 71.2% of cases. The education level of the main parent or guardian was mostly secondary (41.0%) and tertiary (30.8%), with a small number having no formal education (2.0%). See table 1 below for further details.

Socio-demographic variables (N=1,263)	No	%
Age (years)		
<10-12	266	21.1
13-15	771	61.1
16-18	207	16.4
>18	19	1.5
Religion		
Christianity	1258	98.4
Islam	5	0.4
Traditional	15	1.2
Ethnicity		
Yoruba	44	3.5
Igbo	60	4.8
Hausa	6	0.5
Ibibio	1153	91.3
Class		
JSS 1	107	8.5
JSS 2	209	16.5
JSS 3	267	21.1

SS 1	164	13.0
SS 2	286	22.6
SSS 3	230	18.2
Number of Guardians/Parents		
One	323	25.6
Two	902	71.4
More than Two	38	3.0
Sex of Main Guardian		
Female	899	71.2
Male	331	26.2
Both	33	2.6
Main Parent/Guardian Highest Level of Education		
No formal Education	25	2.0
Primary	184	14.6
Secondary	518	41.0
Tertiary	389	30.8
I am not sure/ I don't know	147	11.7

Table 4: Socio-demographic characteristics of female student

Education Stakeholders

The qualitative aspect of this study surveyed 262 respondents with a mean age of 42.29 years, predominantly aged between 31 and 50 years (72.2%). The gender distribution was nearly equal, with females slightly outnumbering males (51.1% vs. 48.9%). Participants were drawn from eight LGAs, with Uyo having the highest representation (16.4%) and Okobo the lowest (8.8%). A significant majority (80.9%) had tertiary education. The study utilised various interview types, with a majority as participants of Focus Group Discussions (71.4%), followed by In-depth Interviews (22.1%) and Key Informant Interviews (6.5%).

Socio-demographic variables (N=262)	No	%
Age (years)		
<20	4	1.5
20–30	48	18.3
31–40	89	34.0
41–50	100	38.2
>50	21	8.0
Sex		
Male	128	48.9
Female	134	51.1

LGA		
Uyo	43	16.4
Eket	37	14.1
Eastern Obolo	36	13.7
Etim Ekpo	28	10.7
Ikot Ekpene	31	11.8
Okobo	23	8.8
Uruan	34	13.0
Ikono	30	11.5
Education Level		
Secondary	50	19.1
Tertiary	212	80.9
Interview Type		
Key Informant Interview (KII)	17	6.5
In-depth Interview (IDI)	58	22.1
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	187	71.4

Table 5: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Education Stakeholders

Perception of Female Students towards Girls' Access to Education

The perception of girls towards girl child education was majorly positive, with 86.5% strongly agreeing and 12.1% agreeing that girls should have access to junior and senior secondary school education. Similarly, 86.2% strongly agreed and 12.0% agreed that girls should be encouraged to go to school. The notion that preference should be given to male child education is largely rejected, with 52.2% strongly disagreeing and 16.2% disagreeing. A significant majority, 80.0%, strongly agreed that educating girls is important, and 79.9% strongly disagreed that it is a waste of time and money. Furthermore, 69.6% strongly disagreed that available money should be spared for boys' education. Equal educational opportunities for girls are strongly supported by 84.7% of respondents, and

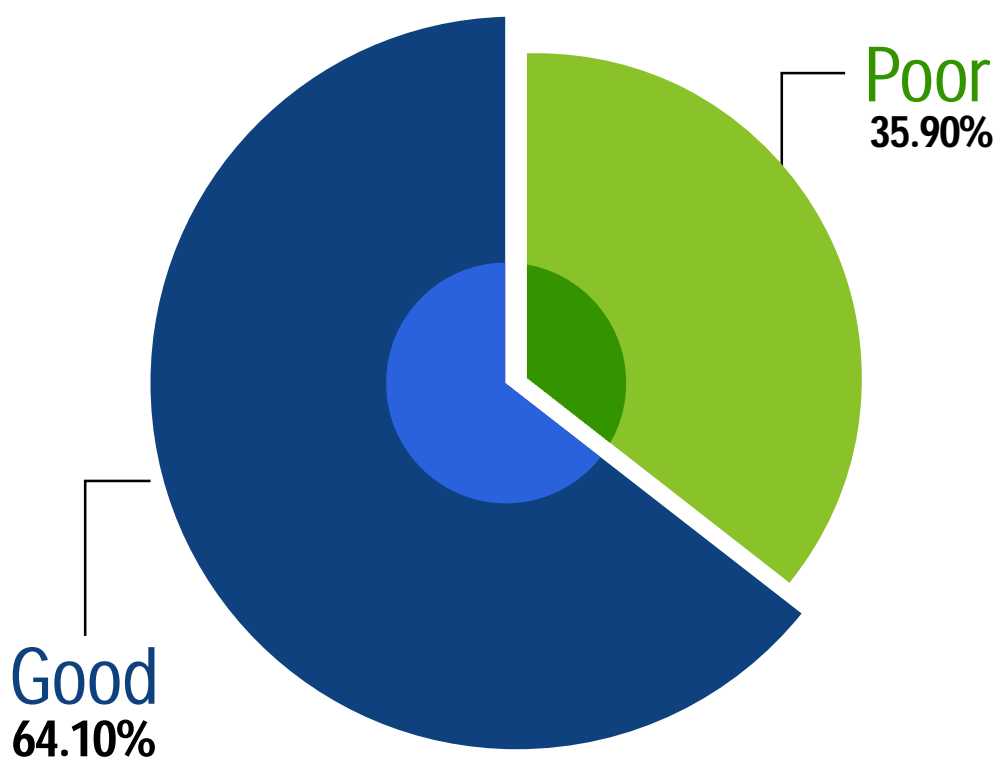
84.3% strongly disagreed with the idea that girls do not need education because their husbands will take care of them. Almost all (93.1%) were against the view that more boys should be educated than girls. Overall, 64.1% of the girl child who participated in the survey had positive perception towards girls' access to education. Despite the fact that a majority of the girls had positive perception, there remains a significant minority with negative perception that needs to be addressed. See table below for details



Perception Statements	SA	A	D	SD
Girls should have access to junior and senior secondary school education	1093 (86.5%)	153 (12.1%)	2 (0.2%)	15 (1.2%)
Girls should be encouraged to go to school	1089 (86.2%)	151 (12.0%)	13 (1.0%)	10 (0.8%)
Preference should be given to male child education	214 (16.9%)	185 (14.6%)	205 (16.2%)	659 (52.2%)
Educating girl child is important	1010 (80.0%)	173 (13.7%)	33 (2.6%)	47 (3.7%)
Educating female children is a waste of time and money	69 (5.5%)	53 (4.7%)	132 (10.5%)	1009 (79.9%)
It is better to spare the available money for boys education	82 (6.5%)	78 (6.2%)	224 (17.7%)	879 (69.6%)
Girls should be provided with equal educational opportunities	1070 (84.7%)	142 (11.2%)	18 (1.4%)	33 (2.6%)
There is need for girls to go to school even though their husband will take care of them	62 (4.9%)	22 (1.7%)	114 (9.0%)	1065 (84.3%)

Table 6: Perception of girls towards girl child education

Fig. 2: Overall Perception of Girls Towards Girl Child Education



Stakeholders' Perception Towards Girls' Access to Education

Participants expressed varying perceptions on access to education, with considerations for both genders. While some advocated for equal opportunities, others weighed the societal dynamics and personal beliefs in their decision-making process. Many acknowledged the importance of educating girls, citing their potential to contribute positively to society and highlighting the need to address gender disparities in education. Responses reflected a change in the previous narration of parents ignoring the girl child education to a shift towards embracing it.

There is a consensus among participants that girls have access to secondary education in Akwa Ibom State, facilitated by government policies such as free and compulsory education. Participants noted an improvement in girls' enrolment rates over the years, with some schools reporting higher numbers of female students compared to males. Despite these advancements, challenges such as poverty and societal attitudes towards girls' education persist, particularly in rural areas. Nonetheless, respondents reported that efforts are being made to promote gender equality in education, with initiatives such as girls' clubs and government interventions aimed at supporting female students.

The perception towards prioritising girls' education was driven by the belief that empowering girls can lead to broader societal benefits. Participants cite examples of successful women in leadership positions as evidence of the potential for girls to excel academically and professionally. However, there were also voices advocating for the education of both

genders, recognising the value of inclusive educational policies and practices. Furthermore, the importance of education for girls is highlighted as a means of empowerment and independence. Participants believed that educating girls equips them with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions about their lives. Educated girls were seen as more likely to pursue higher education, enter the workforce, and become leaders in their communities.

While acknowledging challenges such as financial constraints and infrastructure deficiencies, participants underscore the importance of overcoming these obstacles to ensure that all girls have the opportunity to receive education. They emphasised the need for government support, community involvement, and advocacy efforts to create an environment where girls can thrive academically. Scholarship schemes and financial support emerged as crucial facilitators of access to education, particularly for girls from disadvantaged backgrounds. Participants underscored the need for sustained efforts to address barriers to education and promote gender equality in educational opportunities. Some of the responses were as follows:



““ *My view of girls education in Akwa Ibom State, is that the girls are more in number as compared to their male counterparts and they are equally treated... they are not bullied and are well treated as much as we have female teachers, they take care of the students as mothers.* ””

Non-teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

““ *Yes. Female education is very, very important. Gone are the days that they say female education ends in the kitchen. Our females, they are the ones, the mothers of a nation. And if they are not educated, they are going to produce thugs, you understand? So, they have to be educated and be exposed. By doing so, you will see we have a brighter nation.* ””

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

““ *I will say yes, girls have access to secondary school education in Akwa Ibom State... A good number of girls in Akwa Ibom are in schools quite unlike what we have in some states that we have about the ratio is 70 to 30. But in Akwa Ibom State girls are encouraged and properly motivated to go to schools and they are not doing badly. You see most of those who excel in schools in Akwa Ibom are girls. I listened to one school I watched on social media where one girl was sweeping prizes in one of the schools, best in physics, best in chemistry, and best in almost all the subjects. So, girls are really trying in Akwa Ibom State.* ””

Male, NUT Representative

Some participants expressed concern over the limited access to education for girls, particularly in rural areas. They highlighted cultural beliefs that prioritise marriage and traditional roles for girls, such as assisting with household chores or working in fishing activities, which hinder their access to schooling, especially at the secondary level. Also, not everyone shares the view that girls should have equal access to education. Some individuals believe that educating girls is less important than educating boys, either due to cultural norms or practical considerations such as limited resources. These perspectives contribute to the ongoing challenges faced in ensuring gender equality in education in the region. A few of them are as follows;

““ *Girls should not be educated because they cause a lot of problems in the family. That is my view, they should be taught how to take care of the family and give them little education.”* ””

Teaching Staff, Uyo

“ Well, the access to girls as compared to boys is very narrow, especially in environments like Iko, Eastern Obolo. Because what is actually happening there is that most parents don't promote the girls' education as they do to their boys. That's one of the major setbacks. They believe in marriage. Marrying the females off, or they go with them to their fishing pond, because fishing is the main source of income. So, girl children are mostly used in smoking the fish once the fishermen come back from the sea. Women would be smoking the fish and using these girls to help with that and also sending them to fetch firewood, for the fish smoking. That's what hampers greatly, access of girl child to education precisely at secondary school level. ”

Retired Principal, Eastern Obolo

Stakeholders Perception Towards the Motivation of the Girl Child

Many participants stressed the need for encouragement and support, citing various reasons such as equal rights, economic empowerment, and societal expectations. Many participants emphasised that educating girls is crucial for empowering them and preventing gender-based violence, particularly within marriages. By receiving education, girls are perceived as better equipped to assert their rights and navigate societal expectations, reducing the likelihood of exploitation or maltreatment. Additionally, the potential benefits of education for girls, including personal development, career opportunities, and contribution to family and community well-being, were highlighted as compelling reasons for motivation.

Participants also highlighted the role of parents, communities, and government in providing support and resources to motivate girls to pursue education. The discussions revealed significant cultural and societal barriers that hinder girls' access to education, especially in rural areas where awareness of its importance may be lacking among parents. Participants highlighted the

need for concerted efforts to address these barriers, whether through community outreaches, policy interventions, or targeted support programs. Motivation was viewed as essential to overcome barriers like financial constraints, cultural beliefs, and practical challenges such as menstrual hygiene management, as it can inspire girls to overcome challenges and pursue educational opportunities despite prevailing cultural norms or economic constraints. While some participants argue that motivation should not be necessary, as education is inherently valuable, others recognise the ongoing need to actively encourage girls' education, particularly in regions where entrenched gender disparities persist. Here are some of the responses;



“ I am strongly of the opinion that female education should be encouraged completely. We should encourage them, considering the factors that are mitigating females' education, especially poor backgrounds. ”

Vice Principal, Etim Ekpo LGA

“ I have a daughter, and I have always motivated her to go to school, I make sure I provide all she needs including advice on how to manage her menstrual cycle during school days. This way I am motivating her to attend school. It is my responsibility as a mother to help her and always motivate her since I wasn't educated, she has to so she can achieve more in life.”

Parent, Uruan LGA

“ Yes, we have to motivate our girls to go to school even though they are also yearning to go to school because these days I will not say that it is like yesterday that children were also forced to go and marry. Today every girl wants to go to school.”

Civil Servant, SUBEB

Motivation Strategies for Girl's Education

The participants emphasised the importance of fostering an environment where students, especially girls, feel inspired and empowered to excel academically. One suggested an approach that involves the provision of prizes or scholarships as recognition for high-performing students. By offering tangible rewards, students are incentivised to strive for academic excellence, knowing that their efforts will be acknowledged and rewarded. Opportunities for employment and scholarships serve as strong motivators for girls to pursue higher education. By offering employment opportunities to female graduates and providing scholarships for high-performing students, the society at large can demonstrate the value they place on girls' education. Moreover, rewarding excellence through a structured reward system was emphasised as an effective strategy. Establishing

competitions, end of the year prize-giving day, and offering scholarships serve as incentives for students to work harder and excel academically. Such programs not only recognise students' achievements but also encourage healthy competition and academic growth.

Another strategy identified was verbal encouragement and recognition both at home and in school. Parents, guardians, teachers and school administrators can provide words of encouragement, counselling, and acknowledgement of students' achievements through awards and gifts. Such gestures not only boost students' morale but also reinforce the value of hard work and dedication in their academic pursuits. The school administration should provide a conducive environment where girls are free from bullying and other gender-sensitive issues that can discourage them from going to school.

Additionally, the provision of educational materials and support is highlighted as essential for motivating students, particularly those facing financial challenges. Distributing textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms, and even financial assistance for necessities like sanitary pads can alleviate the financial burden on students and encourage their attendance and active participation in school activities. Seminars and symposiums were also suggested to

motivate girls on the need for education. Role models and inspirational speakers further contribute to motivation by sharing their success stories and emphasizing the importance of education.

Inviting successful individuals, especially women, to speak to students can serve as powerful motivators, inspiring students to strive for success and pursue their educational goals with determination.

“ *My best day in school was during graduation. I saw outstanding students who collected something even from the state government.* ”

Student, Eket LGA

“ *In my opinion, the gender gap in Akwa Ibom State is not wide. There is need for motivation of children in the school, I won't just say females. Generally, the statistics is bad in Africa. And in Nigeria, Nigeria has the highest number of out of school children in the world, according to the statistics from World Bank. The statistics did not say that it had the highest number of out of school girls, but children. So, there is generally the need to motivate children to go to school, not just specifically girls only. The population in our school is good, but it is nothing compared to the number of children that have not come to school. What do we need to bring out more of these children to school? That is the place of that motivation. How many of these children can afford snacks for school? Some of them when they come and see their peers with lunch packs, having what to eat for lunch, and they can't afford it because their parents are poor, they are not encouraged to come back. You know this is a riverine area, they end up following their parents to do fishing, so they can afford those things that they can't afford going to school. So, the last federal government administration tried the school feeding program they came up with. I think those things are not out of place, and I'm happy the federal government didn't do it mainly for a particular gender. So those things will help children in this particular area to participate in education. We need to create recreational centres for them in school, so that they can be endeared by the games, and come to school. So that is the motivation I'm talking about.* ”

Teaching Staff, Eastern Obolo LGA

“ Then coming to the reward system, our society, Nigeria as a whole, don't let me not generalize it, but I feel we do not reward excellence. We have applauded mediocrity and that's why the budget for education is low. A child that is doing well is not being encouraged to go to school. So the one who is not doing well would simply say, ah, if the one that was first in the class is pushing a truck or is selling at the marketplace and the government did not find that child to encourage the child to go to school, then why should I put extra time to my studies? So, there must be this motivation with the reward system must be right, you know, for every child.”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

Fig. 3: Strategies for Girl Child Education Improvement



Stakeholders Efforts Towards Female Retention in Secondary Schools

Through collaboration and targeted interventions, stakeholders work to empower girls, enabling them to overcome obstacles and remain enrolled in secondary schools. This comprehensive approach seeks to create opportunities for girls to succeed academically and fulfill their potential. Below are some of the responses;

“ I normally sit some parents down and inform them on the importance of education, give them the thoughts on the usefulness of education and many things... that they should allow their female children to go to the school.”

Trader, Okobo LGA

Factors Influencing Girl Child Education

From the perspective of the girls, multiple factors influencing girl child education were identified. A significant majority, 68.4%, attributed child labour as a major barrier, closely followed by early marriage (67.7%). Gender discrimination was acknowledged by 61.6%, while 60.9% noted parental ignorance on the importance of girl-child education. Income level of parents/guardians also plays a crucial role, with 64.0% identifying it as an influential factor.

Religious beliefs were less impactful as compared to other factors, with 45.8% citing them as a barrier. Inadequate schools, violence against girls, and lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools were also notable concerns, reported by 52.2%, 57.9%, and 50.9% of the respondents respectively. Additionally, the distance to school, absence of security, and involvement in household chores further hinder girls' education, as indicated by over half of the respondents. See table below for more details.



Factors	Yes	Somewhat	No
Gender discrimination in the society	777 (61.6%)	209 (16.6%)	276 (21.9%)
Level of parent/guardian income	808 (64.0%)	203 (16.1%)	252 (20.0%)
Religious beliefs	577 (45.8%)	178 (14.1%)	505 (40.1%)
Level of education of parent/guardian	601 (47.6%)	216 (17.1%)	444 (35.2%)
Inadequate Schools	659 (52.2%)	250 (19.8%)	353 (27.9%)
Girls lack interest in education	456 (36.1%)	245 (19.4%)	562 (44.5%)
Child/Early marriage	855 (67.7%)	104 (8.2%)	303 (24.0%)
Child labour	863 (68.4%)	161 (12.8%)	237 (18.8%)
Violence against girls	731 (57.9%)	157 (12.4%)	375 (29.7%)
Parental involvement	617 (48.9%)	242 (19.2%)	403 (31.9%)
School environment	650 (51.5%)	219 (17.4%)	392 (31.1%)
Culture and tradition	637 (50.4%)	224 (17.7%)	401 (31.8%)
Violence in school (bullying, corporal punishment)	679 (53.8%)	206 (16.3%)	378 (29.9%)
Lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities in school	643 (50.9%)	202 (16.0%)	418 (33.1%)
Absence of security	667 (52.9%)	208 (16.5%)	385 (30.6%)
Ignorance on part of the parents on importance of girl-child education	769 (60.9%)	211 (16.7%)	283 (22.4%)
Involvement in domestic chores	477 (37.8%)	219 (17.3%)	567 (44.9%)
Death or absence of parent	800 (63.3%)	164 (13.0%)	299 (23.7%)
Location of school (too far from the house)	678 (53.7%)	208 (16.5%)	377 (29.8%)

Table 7: Factors Influencing Girl Child Education

Factors Influencing Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State

Intra-Personal Factors

One significant issue was low self-esteem, where girls may feel ashamed or embarrassed about their academic performance, leading to avoidance of learning institutions. Additionally, there was a prevailing mindset reported among some girls that they cannot excel academically, which affects their motivation and belief in their abilities. A significant challenge of teenage pregnancy, which often leads to girls dropping out of school due to social stigma or lack of support from their families. Many girls who become pregnant at a young age may drop out of school due to social stigma, lack of support from their families, or challenges in balancing childcare responsibilities with academic pursuits. The fear of reintegrating into the educational system after giving birth can further hinder their educational prospects. Misuse of social media was also identified as a distraction for young girls. Despite a level playing ground for education in the state, these personal factors continue to impede girls' access to education.

Inter-Personal Factors

Poverty among parents prevents them from meeting the basic needs of their children, including education-related expenses such as uniforms and books. Additionally, cultural norms prioritize boys' education over girls', with many parents believing that girls will eventually be married off and that investing in their education is unnecessary. Early marriage is common, and girls are often expected to contribute to family income through activities like fish smoking or accompanying parents to the farm, further reducing their opportunities for schooling. Family dynamics, such as divorce or remarriage, also affect girls' education, with some girls living with relatives who may not prioritise their schooling. Many girls in Akwa-Ibom State do not reside with their parents but work as maids instead. While they may possess a strong desire to enhance their education, their progress is hindered by the lack of proper care and support from their employers or guardians. This absence of a nurturing environment significantly impacts their ability to excel academically.

The fact that a significant proportion of parents are not educated have been reported to influence girl child education in Akwa Ibom state. This influences the parents' attitudes towards academics negatively coupled with the overarching cultural belief systems they are accustomed with.

“ Akwa Ibom State as we know, there are very many uneducated parents. And these uneducated parents get more children. Then the more children they have, they want to support their sons for education more than the girls, having in mind that, my daughter will be married out.... Generally as we mentioned, Eastern Obolo is not exceptional. The thing cuts across Akwa Ibom, but the different cultures as we speak. For instance, the Eastern Obolo which I already mentioned the fishing, in Akwa Ibom some families are yet to be educated about girls education, though some families are doing it, but yet to be hundred percent. Infact, we don't have up to sixty percent.”

Retired Principal, Eastern Obolo LGA

“ Some of them are from divorced homes where the father is no longer staying with the mother and some of them might stay with the father who will not pay particular attention to the female needs the way the mother would have. And some of them stay with uncles, and some even stay with distant relatives.”

Vice Principal, Etim Ekpo LGA

“ And maybe some live with their grandmothers. And so, they need to go to the stream to fetch water, all those things pass through here, you know, fry akara. Make sure you sell before coming. Take goods to the market and then before you come and dress and go to school. Even at Uyo, I see students still going to school around ten, eleven. What have you seen? Students are still going to school. So, all these things are factors and distractions.”

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

Community Factors

The responses highlight a myriad of community-related factors influencing girl child education, including societal attitudes, community beliefs, and economic challenges. The respondents reported various enrolment rates among girls in their communities depending on their level of exposure. While some progress has been made in certain communities to promote girl child education, there's still a pressing need for comprehensive awareness campaigns and policy interventions as some cultural beliefs that limit the girl child persists in some communities. Beyond traditional beliefs and economic constraints, other significant barriers include environmental factors like conflict and trafficking, which disrupt educational

opportunities for girls, especially in rural areas. Excess religious activities that eat deep into school time were also identified. Participants also highlighted the detrimental impact of peer pressure, where societal perceptions of women as homemakers rather than intellectuals discourage girls from aspiring to academic success. Furthermore, transportation challenges exacerbate the situation, with the removal of fuel subsidies affecting students' ability to commute to school. Stigmatisation and gender-based violence also play a role in discouraging girls from attending school.

Societal norms and cultural beliefs still prevail in some communities, where girls are often relegated to domestic roles and marriage rather than pursuing education. This bias against female education is evident in some responses shared by the participants, illustrating instances where families prioritise boys' education over girls' or outright discourage girls from attending school. Some ethnic groups perceive educating girls as a loss rather than an investment. Examples were cited where community members discouraged others from enrolling their female children in school due to their cultural beliefs of gender roles. Additionally, certain cultural practices, such as restricting girls from seeing masquerades, aim to protect them but inadvertently limit their access to education. Despite the lack of direct government policies affecting them, community beliefs and parent involvement play significant roles in shaping girls' educational opportunities. Moreover, during festive periods, girls may face distractions that affect their academic focus, suggesting the need for guidance and support from educators and guardians to keep them engaged in schooling.

Economic factors such as poverty and the cost of living contribute to girls being withdrawn from school to work as domestic servants or to alleviate financial burdens on their families. Financial limitations often prompt families to prioritise immediate needs over investing in their daughters' schooling. Girls from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to basic necessities such as school supplies and meals, deterring them from attending school. Additionally, during the farming season, girls are often required to assist with household chores or work in the fields, further reducing their time for education. The economic stability of families plays a crucial role in determining girls' educational opportunities, as sufficient resources enable them to afford school fees, supplies, and other essentials. Addressing poverty and socioeconomic disparities is essential to ensuring equal access to education for all girls, regardless of their financial circumstances. Some of the responses are as follows:

“ We still have those communities that look down on female children and they do not think they should be educated. Whenever I speak, I speak from experience. There was a man that lived with my cousin, the man said that he cannot send a female child to school. Immediately after the child finished primary school, he stopped sending the child to school saying he has no money.”

45 years, Teaching Staff, Ikot Ekpene LGA

““ *This relationship is also destroying our girls. Most men corrupt our small girls and lavish money on them, making them believe education isn't important and that it is a waste of time. Also sending young girls to be domestic servants because of poverty, their parents do this to get money, you will see students this session and next session you will not see them again, and after a year they will come back to repeat those classes, things like that is what hinders the girl child.*”

Uruan, Non-teaching staff

““ *Environmental issues and community issues because most people tend to send their female for house help, most of them will bundle them to go and marry, most of them because of improper care, they will end up indulging in unwanted sex that leads to pregnancy that will stop them from going to school, so environmental and community factors really have a very high influence on girls.*”

Okobo, Teaching Staff

““ *Another thing that is also a factor affecting girl child education is the community factor. Trafficking of girl child, is a major factor here in Akwa Ibom State because we see most parent give out their children for hard labour to go live with people and become house maid so it's a major factor and most of these children do not have the opportunity of attending secondary school and it always within the age 11 upward. So, it is a major factor here.*”

Female, NSCDC

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors identified were inadequate teachers, teaching approach, distance, security, educational, school environment and WASH facilities. The shortage of qualified teachers is identified as a key issue, indicating a need for more educators to meet the demand. Participants pointed out that teacher behaviour, such as being overly harsh or punitive, can instill fear in students and lead to them avoiding school. In one instance, a specific teacher's intimidating approach is mentioned as causing fear among students. Additionally, the transfer of teachers to distant locations due to logistical reasons was identified as impacting both teacher performance and student outcomes. The presence of counselors is noted as important for addressing students' needs and increases retention rates among the girl child.

The respondents raised concerns about the distance students must travel, particularly in remote areas where transportation options are limited to boats. Emphases were laid on the physical strain girls endure, such as trekking long distances to school, which affects their willingness and ability to attend regularly. For those in urban areas, transportation costs were identified as a significant barrier, with some families unable to afford daily expenses for their daughters' commute. Moreover, concerns were raised about the safety of transportation

methods, such as the risk of harassment or abduction while commuting to school. This fear further deters girls from attending school regularly, impacting their education and well-being. Linked with long travel distances to school are security and safety measures to protect girls. Efforts to address these concerns included security patrols, school fencing, day and night security guards in schools, and collaboration with security agencies. Additionally, sensitisation and training initiatives were highlighted as necessary to ensure student safety and enhance girls' access to education. The bodies responsible for providing security measures in schools include Civil defence, Police, Ministry of Women Affairs, Drug law, NAPTIP, Ministry of Education, lawyers, International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA).

Participants highlighted inadequate school infrastructure such as leaking classrooms, which leads to parents withdrawing their children during the rainy season. Additionally, the lack of library facilities was noted. Suggestions were made to improve conditions, such as transforming day schools into boarding schools to provide better healthcare and study opportunities for female students. Government support in providing essential supplies like pens and books was also emphasised to motivate girls to attend school. The discussions highlighted several concerns regarding female health and sanitation in schools. Participants emphasised the need for adequate health facilities and hygiene resources to support female students. Issues such as the lack of proper sanitary materials, toilets, and clean water were identified as barriers to girls' education. It was noted that the absence of essential items like sanitary pads often leads to girls staying away from school to avoid discomfort and embarrassment during menstruation. Additionally, inadequate toilet facilities and access to clean water contribute to hygiene concerns, potentially exposing students to infections and illnesses. Additionally, participants discussed the importance of hygiene practices, such as handwashing, to prevent infections. Collaborative efforts between students and staff were also mentioned to maintain cleanliness on school premises. Roles such as sanitary prefects, utility prefects, and compound masters were mentioned as essential in overseeing hygiene practices and cleanliness initiatives. Few of the responses provided are as follows:

“ Security has affected it positively, we have mounted security bits where officers tours the school. My office, we have toured round the school to see if the students lingers around during school hours, you will see you won't see students lingers. We do sensitisation house to house, we use grassroots security to bring children who were trafficked to Cameroon as house helps to bring them back to reunite with their families. Some of these children are working on the farms, some with fishermen and they're not going to school.”

Male, Civil Servant

“ Some of them don't have parents and some of them their parents aren't well to do, and some of them at attending schools at distance very far that can cost up to #500 on transportation, if you calculate that in five days, it is a big money for their parents to foot such bills, so transportation has stopped so many girls from going to schools

Driver, Uruan LGA

“ I want to add to that. While constructing the class block, I know the secondary I attended, every class block, the line of these, has toilets. So, if we have toilets and water close to the class block to help the hygienic situation of the girls, it will also go a long way in addition to what has been said about the class block” ”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

Fig. 4: Factors Influencing Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom (Stakeholders Perspectives)



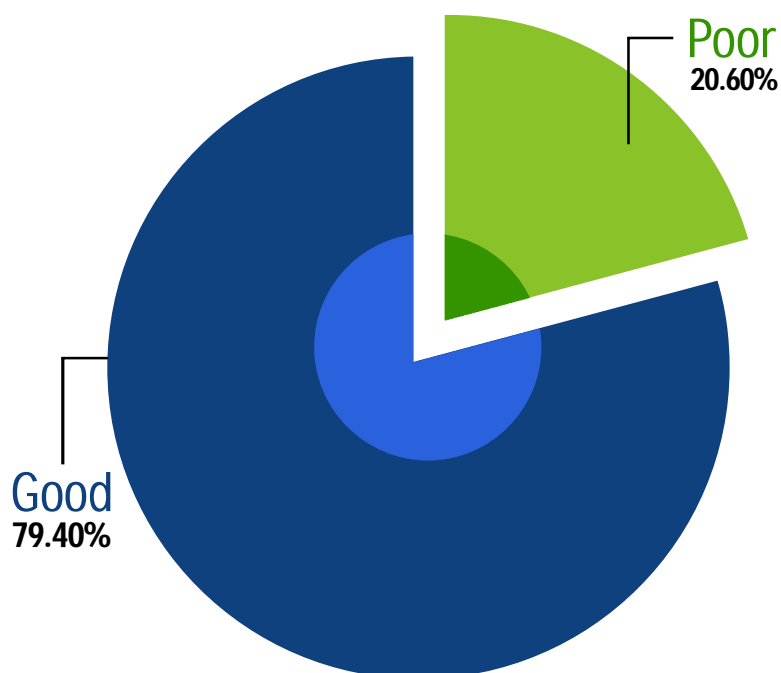
Attitude of Female Students towards Girl Child Education

The result of the survey showed that 79.4% of the students had a positive attitude towards girl child education. A vast majority, 98.1%, were comfortable with girls going to school, and 97.4% support girl child education. Only a small fraction, 11%, prefer educating a male child over a female, while 89% disagreed with this preference. Additionally, 95.4% of respondents would encourage a girl to attend school, and 95% support equal educational opportunities for both males and females. These findings indicate a strong consensus among female students in favour of girl child education and gender equality in educational opportunities. Further breakdown is contained below.

Attitudinal Statements	SA	A	D	SD
I'm comfortable with girls going to school	1034 (81.9%)	204 (16.2%)	6 (0.5%)	19 (1.5%)
I support girl child education	1043 (82.6%)	187 (14.8%)	11 (0.9%)	22 (1.7%)
I prefer to educate a male child than to send a girl to school	83 (6.6%)	55 (4.4%)	161 (12.7%)	964 (76.3%)
I can encourage a girl to go to school	984 (78.0%)	219 (17.4%)	23 (1.8%)	36 (2.9%)
I support equal educational opportunities for both male and females	988 (78.2%)	212 (16.8%)	20 (1.6%)	43 (3.4%)

Table 8: Perception of girls towards girl child education

Fig. 5: Overall Attitude of Female Students Towards Girl Child Education in Akwa Ibom State



The table below presents the association between the survey respondents' perception, attitude, class and age. The result shows that there was a statistically significant association between the perception ($X^2=42.760$, $p<0.000$) and attitude ($X^2=20.497$, $p=0.001$) of the girls towards education and their class while there was no statistically significant between their perception and attitude with their age group. The result also showed a significant association between the perception and attitude of the girls towards the girl-child education ($X^2=282.074$, $p<0.000$).

Variables	Perception Category		X^2	P-Value
	Poor	Good		
Age (years)				
<10–12	108 (23.8%)	158 (19.5%)		
13–15	272 (60.0%)	499 (61.9%)	6.416	0.093
16–18	70 (15.5%)	137 (16.9%)		
>18	3 (0.7%)	16 (2.0%)		
Class				
JSS 1	61 (13.5%)	46 (5.7%)	42.760	0.000*
JSS 2	72 (15.9%)	137 (16.9%)		
JSS 3	106 (23.4%)	161 (19.9%)		
SSS 1	65 (14.3%)	99 (12.2%)		
SSS 2	98 (21.6%)	188 (23.2%)		
SSS 3	51 (11.3%)	179 (22.1%)		

Attitude					
Poor	209 (46.1%)	51 (6.3%)	282.074	0.000*	
Good	244 (53.9%)	759 (93.7%)			
		Attitude Category		X ²	P-Value
		Poor	Good		
Age (Years)					
<10-12	58 (21.8%)	208 (78.2%)			
13-15	162 (21.0%)	609 (79.0%)	2.132	0.545	
16-18	38 (18.4%)	169 (81.6%)			
>18	2 (10.5%)	17 (89.5%)			
Class					
JSS 1	36 (33.6%)	71 (66.4%)	20.497	0.001*	
JSS 2	39 (18.7%)	170 (81.3%)			
JSS 3	61 (22.8%)	206 (77.2%)			
SSS 1	39 (23.8%)	125 (76.2%)			
SSS 2	53 (18.5%)	233 (81.5%)			
SSS 3	32 (13.9%)	198 (86.1%)			

*Statistically Significant

Table 9: Association between Respondents' Perception, Attitude, Class and Age

Practice of Female Students towards Girl Child Education

Practice Statements	Yes	No
I make efforts to ensure girls don't drop out of school	1201 (95.1%)	62 (4.9%)
I encourage other female students to be educated	1218 (96.4%)	45 (3.6%)
Parents in my neighbourhood prefer to educate their male children over female children	291 (23.0%)	972 (77.0%)
Will you send your girls to school even though they will still get married when they grow up and end up in their husband's house?	1098 (87.13%)	164 (13.0%)

Table 10: Practice of Female Students towards Girl Child Education

Quality of Education

The perceptions regarding the quality of education vary among respondents, with some positive comments expressing confidence in the efforts made by public schools to maintain high standards to critical assessments. However, some respondents expressed a mixed sentiment, stating that while the quality of education is not bad, there are implementation challenges hindering its effectiveness, with various perspectives highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Many respondents expressed satisfaction with the current state of education, attributing it to the efforts of both the government and teachers. They acknowledge the provision of free and compulsory education as a significant step forward, making schooling more accessible, particularly for girls who might have faced financial barriers previously. The presence of qualified teachers in public schools was also highlighted as a contributing factor to the perceived improvement in educational quality. Teachers emphasised their commitment to ensuring that students receive proper education, including thorough preparation for exams. Moreover, there are mentions of disparities between public and private schools, with observations that private institutions may offer better resources and facilities. This raises questions about the equitable distribution of educational resources and the need for closer monitoring and funding by the government to ensure that

all students receive a high-quality education, regardless of the type of school they attend.

However, alongside this praise, there are also calls for continued enhancements. Some respondents stressed the need for additional resources, such as books and learning materials, particularly for families who struggle financially. Participants also highlight specific challenges faced by rural schools, such as a lack of functional science laboratories, which can adversely affect students' learning experiences. Others raise concerns about specific aspects of education, such as the absence of practical skills or entrepreneurship training within the curriculum, which they believe could better prepare students for the future. Government intervention was seen as essential in addressing these issues, with respondents urging policymakers to prioritise education and provide adequate resources to schools, particularly those in underserved areas. Despite efforts to improve the curriculum and enhance educational opportunities, there remains skepticism about the overall quality of education, particularly in comparison to private schools. The dominance of the private sector in education is noted, raising questions about the government's oversight and funding of public schools. Here are some of the responses;

**Ikike aba n'te l'kang, ese
B'abada Yak'asak**

**Knowledge is like a fire; it needs to
be ignited**

“The quality of education I am offered in my school is very excellent because the teachers here do a very good job and the school compound is serene for learning.”

-Student, Uyo LGA

““ *The area of sciences, like physics and chemistry, we are combining them now. Actually, I have seen some of the apparatus in chemistry, but they don't even have a chemistry teacher and it's like no teacher. And some of the things they have, might not even be relevant to them when they are writing exams. So, each time they want to write an exam, they have to apply to the principal to buy an apparatus to set the lab for them to write exams. So, normally it shouldn't be. The government should have looked into that and made provisions for all that. But they are actually neglecting it in rural areas.*”

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

““ *Well, from what we are seeing, though the private sector have dominated them. When you look, you tend to see more of private schools. But I feel its good looking at even their curriculum. It's good. For the public school there is a challenge, and I will say will be attributed to the government. Maybe they are not monitoring the educational sector well or the educational sector is not well funded. You will see most people rather prefer the private schools than accessing the public schools so it is a major problem.*”

Female, CSO Representative

““ *The quality of education offered to schools in general in Akwa Ibom State needs to be improved because like in this village, you don't have schools that have basic educational quality facilities just like the chairs, quality teachers, and books for children to learn from. If you equip the school, you don't only equip it for the girls alone, you equip it for everybody.*”

Religious Leader, Etim Ekpo LGA

Despite the fact that a good proportion of the stakeholders had a positive perception, some of them reported a troubling state of affairs with an expression of deep concerns about the current condition of the educational system and characterised the quality as poor or below average. They cited a range of deficiencies plaguing the system, including a shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate infrastructure such as dilapidated buildings, and a lack of basic amenities like textbooks and laboratories. Furthermore, respondents lament the erosion of discipline and commitment among students, with some attributing this decline to the pervasive use of

technology as a substitute for genuine learning. There was a perceived lack of student engagement, attributed in part to distractions such as mobile phones. They lamented the reduction of academic rigour and rote memorization in favour of technological aids and shortcuts, which are a break from conventional educational ideals. Overall standards are said to have declined as a result of this change in educational culture, particularly when compared to past generations. A significant issue identified is the perceived lack of government intervention in addressing these challenges. Stakeholders

assert that increased funding and effective policy implementation are imperative to enhance educational standards, particularly in rural areas where conditions are reportedly more dire. Collaborative efforts between the government and educational institutions are

deemed necessary to address infrastructural deficiencies, bolster teaching staff, and ensure optimal learning conditions. Failure to address these concerns promptly may impede progress in the state's educational landscape.

“ You can imagine when we have more than 20 subjects or so, isn't it just like I have said, look at the number of teachers we have here. You understand? Especially rural areas, yes, really neglected. They are really neglected when it comes to basic educational needs. We don't have teachers. We don't have enough hands. We don't have enough, what do you call it, should I say, materials. These students don't have toilets, which is not supposed to be like that. You understand? So, it's very, very poor, especially in the rural areas.”

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

“ Very poor, very very poor. If you compare the standard of education we had in our time, to what we have now it is very poor. No laboratories in some secondary schools. No infrastructure is in place as mentioned earlier, no laboratories, sometimes it gets so bad that these schools even lack chalk to use and teach. Teachers are missing periods, subject teachers for the most of the subjects here are not available. Some schools, you find just one teacher teaching English. So, the quality is very bad. Government really needs to do something about it.”

Teaching Staff, Eastern Obolo LGA

“ I am an evaluator of education, we go to schools. What we have in the system is appalling. I must be very sincere to you. I am from Akwa Ibom State. Our children have been exposed to all kinds of... I don't know how to put it. Education in Akwa Ibom State is a fraud. We have defrauded the future of our children. For example, how do we go to secondary school where they have learners without textbooks. Learners in Akwa Ibom state schools do not have textbooks. When we say evaluation, we enter the classrooms and watch what teachers are doing. What quality do you want me to mention? Is it the population explosion, you go to a class and you see 50 or 80 learners in one classroom, is it infrastructure, is it the laboratory, you go to school there is no library. The nearest school here, Four towns, has no library. I have been to so many schools. Is it toilets? The building you have is not girl child friendly, how do you expect a girl child to go to school without urinary, and if it is a mixed school, the toilet should be gender friendly. Uyo High does not have a toilet for learners. What I am telling you now is empirical, we go touch, see and interact with them and then we write reports to see whether they could be a change. Is it the teachers? Teachers are not satisfied, teachers are not committed, teachers are not educated, how then do you talk about quality? When we go, we look for their WAEC

result and we see those results. It doesn't reflect what we have on the ground, you see results, 100%, 80%, 90% but these learners cannot write, so you see a disjoint, how do they write their exams and pass and get 90%. How do you have a 90% score when there are no test scores, some schools cannot keep records or work, so what kind of record do you submit to WAEC or NECO? What is it that they have done well, So we cannot talk about standard of education. This morning I passed through Four Towns and West Itam and at quarter to 9am, learners were still strolling to school. If you go to Four Towns, the learners we have there are about six thousand, same with West Itam School. Then you think of the buildings, no toilet facilities, no library, no laboratory. The quality of teaching and learning is so poor. Is it the ministry of education? If you go and interact with those in the offices you will know that they do not know anything. It is a fact, I am not a politician And what appalls me is that this thing has continued for so many years and we keep bringing out future leaders who can do nothing.”

Educationist, Federal Ministry of Education

Perceptions of female secondary school students towards the quality of education

Just like the education stakeholders, female secondary school students had varied perceptions towards the quality of education they received. About three-quarter (73.4%) felt they were being groomed for leadership, and 69.8% believed they had equal opportunities to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities, only 56.7% were satisfied with the overall quality of education. Many students perceived significant deficiencies in infrastructure, with 41.9% reporting a lack of enough toilets, 46.6% stating inadequate water supply for toilets, and 32% indicating insufficient seating during class. Additionally, only 21.2% believed their school laboratories were well-equipped, with 51.2% expressing dissatisfaction. Despite these challenges, 60.3% acknowledged having educational opportunities like quiz competitions and scholarships, and 55.7% noted the availability of guidance and counselling services. However, a significant portion felt the need for improvements in basic facilities and resources to enhance their educational experience. See table for more details.

Perception Statements	SA	A	D	SD
I am satisfied with the quality of education I receive from my school	716 (56.7%)	215 (17.0%)	126 (10.0%)	206 (16.3%)
We have enough toilets in my school	289 (22.9%)	248 (19.6%)	197 (15.6%)	529 (41.9%)
There is adequate water supply for the toilets in my school	238 (18.8%)	215 (17.0%)	222 (17.6%)	588 (46.6%)

The number of teachers are enough for the students in my school	485 (38.4%)	192 (15.2%)	190 (15.0%)	396 (31.4%)
Girls have educational opportunities (quiz competitions, scholarships etc.)	761 (60.3%)	260 (20.6%)	73 (5.8%)	169 (13.4%)
Female students have an opportunity to lead and are being groomed to leadership	927 (73.4%)	258 (20.4%)	35 (2.8%)	43 (3.4%)
Guidance and counselling is available for females in my school	704 (55.7%)	279 (22.1%)	102 (8.1%)	178 (14.1%)
Girls are given equal opportunity to participate in sports and extra-curricular activities	881 (69.8%)	283 (22.4%)	43 (3.4%)	55 (4.4%)
Girls receives sexuality education and life skill education in my school	645 (51.1%)	264 (20.9%)	119 (9.4%)	235 (18.6%)
We have enough chairs to comfortably sit during the class	439 (34.8%)	208 (16.5%)	212 (16.8%)	404 (32.0%)
Our school laboratories are well equipped	267 (21.2%)	166 (13.2%)	182 (14.4%)	646 (51.2%)

Table 11: Perception of female secondary school students towards the quality of education

Strategies to Improve the Quality of Education

The responses gathered highlight a variety of perspectives on how to enhance educational opportunities for girls, emphasizing the importance of a multi-faceted approach. One recurring theme is the need for financial support, with many respondents advocating for assistance in covering expenses like textbooks, uniforms, and exam fees. Some suggested that both government and private sector intervention could alleviate the financial burden on families, ensuring that economic constraints do not hinder girls' access to education. Scholarships were suggested as a viable means of sustaining girls, especially those from low socio-economic background. Many respondents stress the importance of ensuring equal access to these resources to mitigate disparities and promote inclusivity in the classroom. Alongside financial support, there was a strong emphasis on encouragement from teachers, parents, and the broader community. Recognising and celebrating girls' academic achievements was seen as crucial for fostering a positive learning environment and motivating continued dedication to their studies.

Participants suggested that government intervention plays a pivotal role in addressing infrastructural deficiencies, including the provision of adequate resources and facilities. Respondents reported that infrastructure and facilities play a critical role, with calls for improvements in security, sanitation, and maintenance of essential amenities like laboratories, libraries, electricity, toilets, and new school buildings. Some suggested the creation of more boarding schools to enable students focus fully on their studies. Additionally, the provision of adequate resources such as textbooks, exercise books, and school bags is highlighted as essential for facilitating effective learning. Provision of a better and conducive learning

environment is therefore underpinned as a major strategy for improving education quality. To achieve this, the stakeholder recognise the need for more budget allocation as the current allocation, even at the federal level is insufficient in completing necessary projects and interventions. Efforts to enhance accountability and transparency in education governance were also highlighted, with calls for improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of policies and programmes. Some respondents also mentioned that politics should not be involved in the interventions and support provided to schools, especially those in rural areas, as it directly affects the quality of education in the state. Due diligence should be done before the approval of new schools and existing schools should be regularly assessed. Other key priorities were building more schools and improving existing facilities, along with ensuring access to quality teachers and educational materials.

Participants highlighted the significance of teacher training and professional development programmes to improve teaching quality and effectiveness. They stressed the need for continuous support and capacity-building initiatives to empower teachers in delivering high-quality instruction. Moreover, calls were made for measures to improve teacher welfare and staffing levels, recognising the crucial role teachers play in shaping educational outcomes. The employment of more teachers was also highlighted as a strategy to improve the quality of education in the state. On the other hand, some government officials pointed out the need for existing teachers to improve their attitude to work and give their best to educating the students. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of curriculum improvements to align with educational standards and enhance the learning experience for students. The re-introduction of school clubs such as literary and debate, jet club were suggested so as to enhance educational activities.

There was a strong emphasis on parental education and awareness programmes to highlight the dual purpose of education for both the government and the child. This includes efforts to educate parents about the value of education for their daughters, dispelling notions that may discourage girls from pursuing schooling, such as early marriage. Also, educating parents and guidance on the need to invest their wards education as textbooks and other writing materials needs to be provided to the students. Community engagement also emerged as a key strategy, with participants advocating for awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts to promote the value of education and encourage parental involvement. Initiatives like parent-teacher associations creates an avenue for the involvement of parents and guidance in actively supporting the improvement of the quality of education. They underscored the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools, communities, and relevant stakeholders to foster a conducive learning environment and support student success.

“*Parents should be made to understand that it is only tuition that is free in Akwa Ibom State, books are not given free. I went to the class today and a child does not have up to 4 exercise books and they are offering up to 13 subjects. How can that child cope and she was a girl child. She does not have books. So they should be properly oriented, parents should be made to know that it is only tuition that is free in Akwa Ibom State and not the books both exercise books and textbooks.*”

Non-teaching Staff, Eket LGA

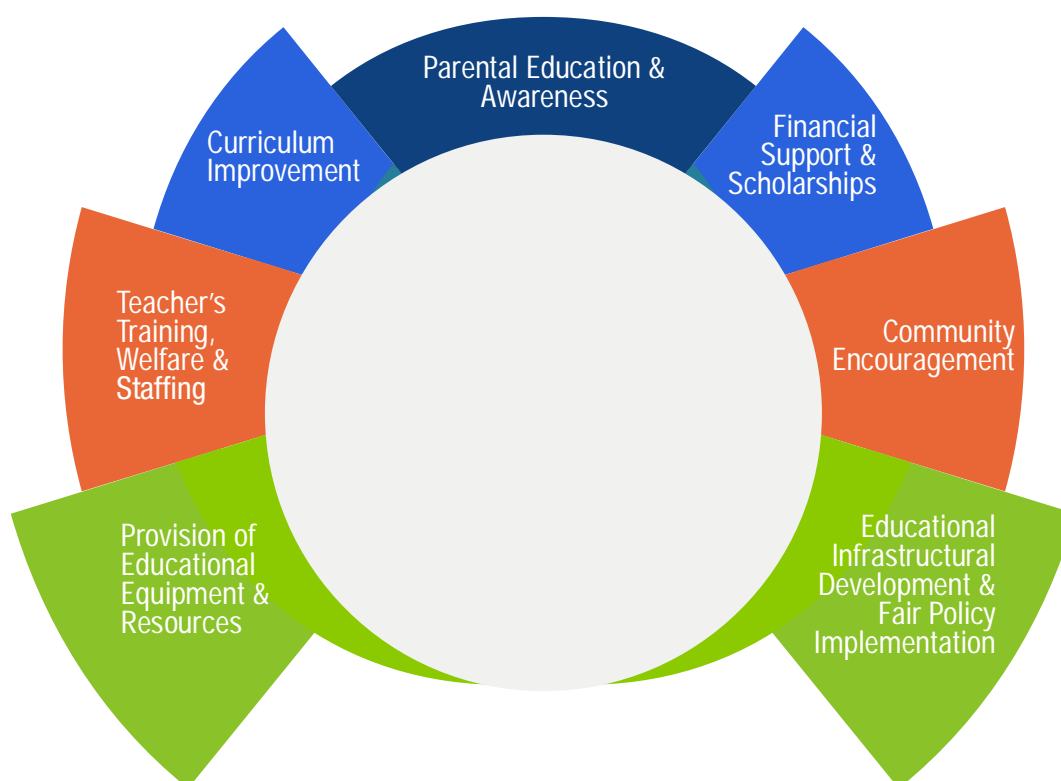
“ One of the things I think the government, or any organisation should help with is the female students, especially in our rural area here, most of them are from poor backgrounds. So, if the government apart from the free education that the state government is doing. They should also check how they could help them. Maybe build hostels and allow them to stay in the hostel while the government is paying for their accommodation and feeding. By doing so, those girls who are maybe discouraged because of their financial background could be made to be in school. Now for those of them that are already in school, I thought about helping them with their uniform, maybe their sanitary parts, stuff like that. And they should also be made to have functional school activities like the laboratory and the library that I spoke of earlier.”

Teaching Staff, Etim Ekpo LGA

“ If you look at it, from the federal government to the state government, the percentage allocated to education is very poor. The United Nation said that we have between 15 percent to 25 percent of national budget allocation, but we have less than 1 percent of the national budget allocation to education. We really need to step up. Government needs to be deliberate in the allocation to education, and step it up. With provision of laboratories, renovation of classroom blocks, motivation for teachers, scholarships should be introduced. Facilities and infrastructures. These things have been missing for so long and it's time to fix them.”

Teaching Staff, Eastern Obolo LGA

Fig. 6: Strategies to Improve the Quality of Education



DATA INTERPRETATION FROM 2019 WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (WASSCE) STATISTICS PERFORMANCE OF GIRLS IN AKWA STATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The data set collated from the year 2019 West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) for Akwa Ibom State shows that **17,749 male and 18,815 female students took the examination, making a total of 36,564 students**. Of this number 8,406 male and 9,255 female students passed the examinations. This means they had 5 credits and above, including Mathematics and English. A total of 17,661 students passed the examinations.

9,343 males and 9,560 females failed the examinations, making a total of 18,903 students who failed the 2019 West African Secondary School Certificate Examination in Akwa Ibom State. The disparities in academic performance among male and female students from different local government areas and senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State are highlighted below

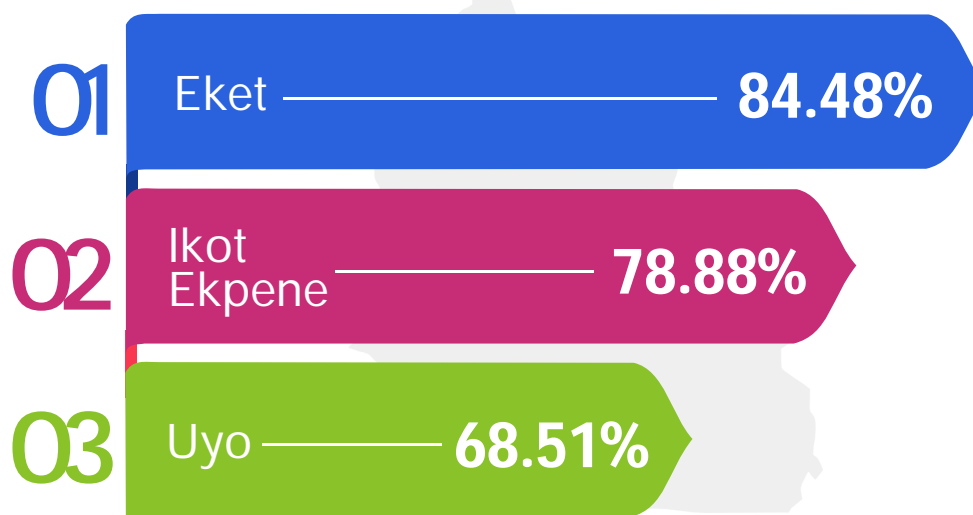
General Performance Based on Senatorial Districts

The 2019 WASSCE data reflects a better academic performance in **Akwa Ibom South (Eket) Senatorial District** with local government areas such as Mkpata Enin, Onna, Mbo, Ibeno and Okobo topping the chart with passing percentages of 84.48%, 77.77%, 66.74%, 66.32%, 60.03% respectively.

This was followed by **Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District (Ikot Ekpene)** which has 10 LGAs, including local government areas like Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Ikono, Oruk Anam and Essien Udim with 72.88%, 67.31%, 61.29%, 58.85% and 55.74% pass rates respectively.

The senatorial district that performed the least is the **Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo) Senatorial District** which has 9 LGAs. Local Governments like Uruan, Ibiono Ibom, Nsit Ubium and Nsit Atai topped the list with 68.51%, 59.63%, 56.67%, and 41.51% pass rate performance respectively.

Fig. 7: Top Performance in the Zones



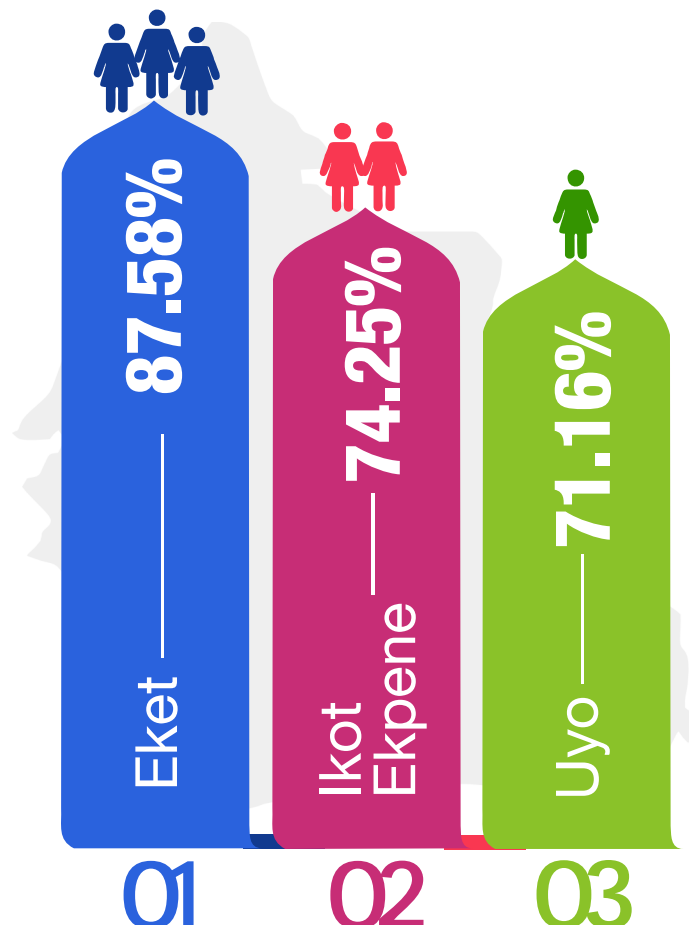
Performance of Females Per Senatorial District

The performance of female also reflects the general performance of the senatorial districts. The Senatorial District that performed best in terms of female performance is **Akwa Ibom South (Eket) Senatorial District**, where there are local governments like Mkpata Enin, Onna and Ibeno ranking high with 87.58%, 79.02% and 70.79% respectively. Despite being the senatorial district with great female performance, we still have local governments like Oron, Ikot Abasi and Udung Uko with 15.76%, 30.00%, and 33.59% respectively performing the least in this constituency.

The second-best senatorial district in terms of female performance is **Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District (Ikot Ekpene)**. Local governments like Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara and Ikono topped the list with 74.25%, 69.61%, and 66.27% respectively. We also had local governments like Etim Ekpo, Abak and Ini with 44.62%, 32.33% and 26.52% respectively reflecting the lowest performance in this senatorial district.

The senatorial district with the poorest performance is **Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo) Senatorial District** with Uruan, Ibiono Ibom and Nsit Ubium LGAs which passed with 71.16%, 61.59%, and 54.18% respectively. We also have local governments like Ibesikpo Asutan, Nsit Ibom and Uyo with the lowest academic performance at 31.66%, 28.01% and 15.02% respectively.

Fig. 8: Ranking of Top Female Performance per Senatorial District

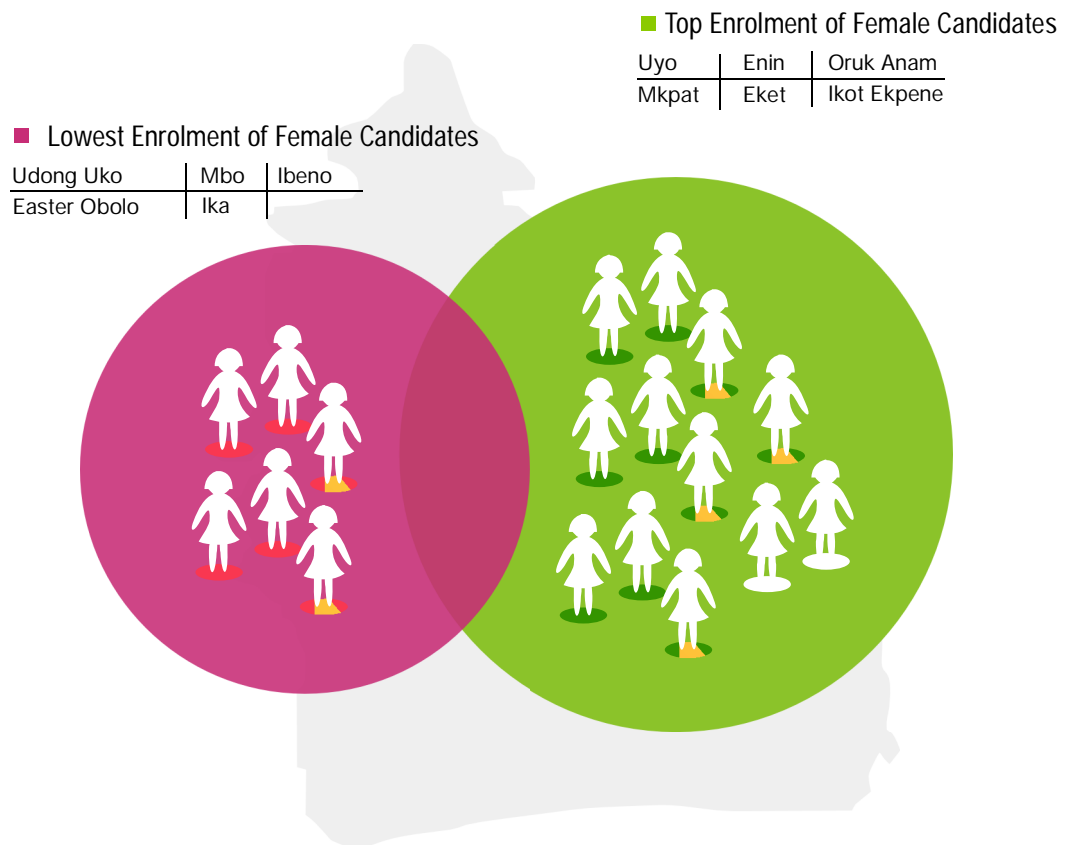


Female Students Enrollment

From the 2019 WASSCE examinations, we had local governments like Uyo, Mkpát Enin, Eket, Oruk Anam, and Ikot Ekpene having a high rate of female enrollment, while local governments like Udung Uko, Eastern Obolo, Ibeno, Mbo and Ika had a very low rate of female enrollment. The listed local government areas with high rates of female enrollment had a better academic performance that is above 50% except for Uyo LGA, whose female students' performance was critically low.

The LGAs with the lowest female enrollment also had better female academic performance, with the exception of Udung Uko and Ika Local Government Areas.

Fig. 9: Female Students Enrollment



DATA INTERPRETATION FROM 2020 WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (WASSCE) STATISTICS PERFORMANCE OF GIRLS IN AKWA STATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

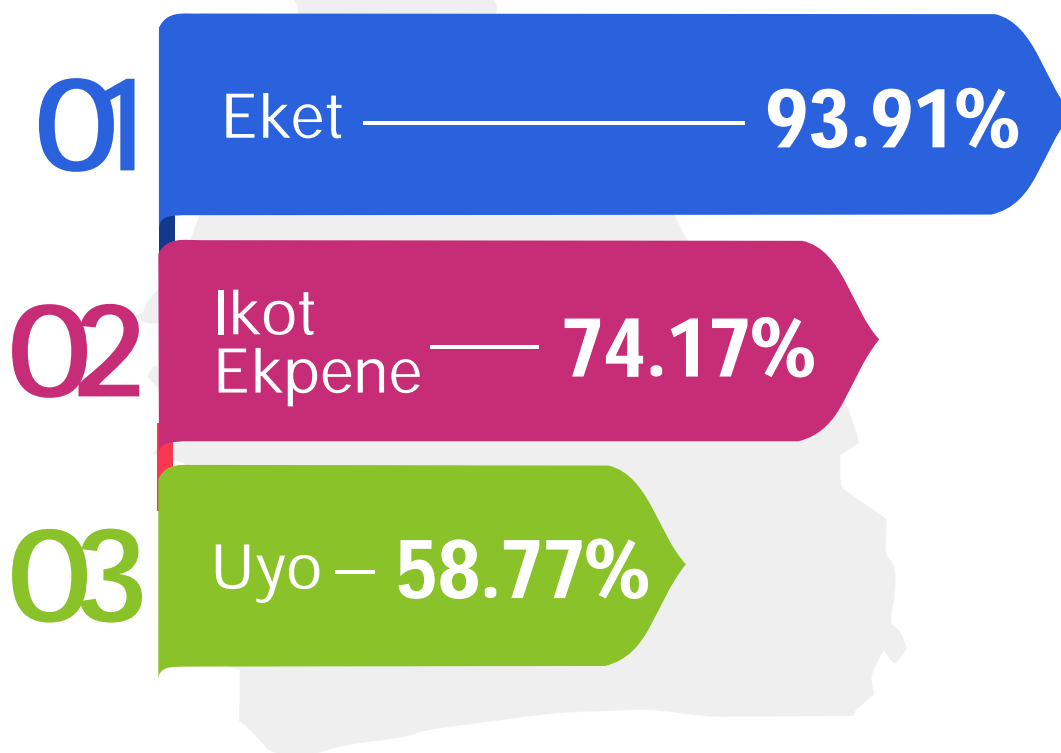
The 2020 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) data for Akwa Ibom State reveals notable variations in academic performance across different senatorial districts and Local Government Areas (LGAs). The breakdown is as follows –

Performance by Senatorial District

The 2020 WASSCE reflects better academic results in **Akwa Ibom South (Eket) Senatorial District**, with Local Government Areas such as Ibeno, Mbo, Mkpat Enin, Udung Uko, Ikot Abasi leading the ranks of local government where students both male and female students performed the best with percentage passes of 93.91%, 87.99%, 87.47%, 84.02%, and 82.91% respectively.

The second senatorial District that followed was **Akwa Ibom North West (Ikot Ekpene) Senatorial District**, with Local Government Areas such as Ini (74.17%), Ikot Ekpene (73.17%) and Abak (70.59%) having the top three best performances for both males and females. Relatively, **Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo) Senatorial District** was the least performing district, with the following performance across some of the LGAs – Uyo (26.98%), Uruan (58.77%), and Itu (47.64%).

Fig. 10: Top Performance in the Zones



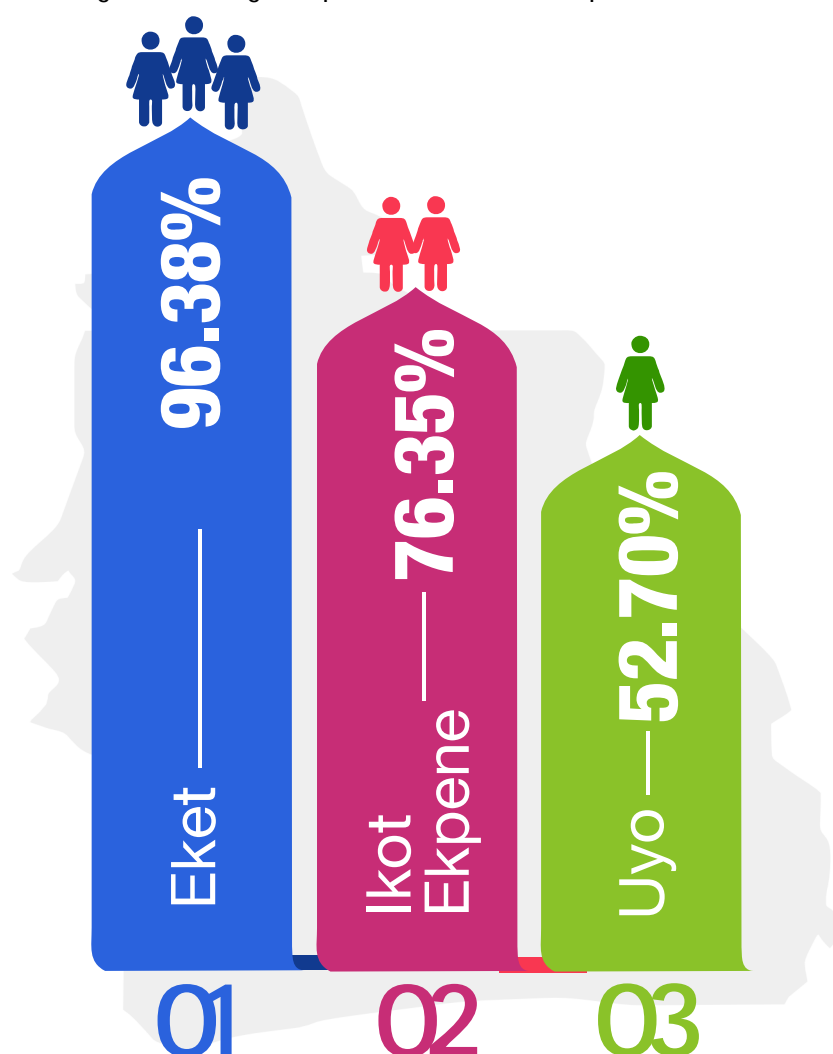
Performance Of Female Students By Senatorial Districts

The 2020 WASSCE reflects better academic results for females in **Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District** with Local Government Areas such as Ibeno, Mbo, Mkpaf Enin, Udung Uko, Ikot Abasi leading the ranks of LGAs where female students performed the best with passed percentage of 96.38%, 90.29%, 89.77%, 89.74%, and 89.47% respectively.

The second senatorial District that followed was **Akwa Ibom North West Senatorial District** with LGAs like Ini (76.35%), Ikot Ekpene (73.85%) and Abak (73.40%) having the top three best performances for females, Relatively, **Akwa Ibom North East (Uyo) Senatorial District** was the least performing district, with the following female performance across some of the LGAs — like Uyo (24.18%), Uruan (62.33%), and Itu (52.70%).

From observations, academic performance among enrolled females generally tends to be better in rural areas compared to urban areas. However, specific urban areas like Uyo and Eket face significant challenges, particularly with high failure rates among females. In suburban areas, performance varies: for instance, Etinan performed well, whereas Ibiono Ibom faced substantial challenges.

Fig. 11: Ranking of Top Female Performance per Senatorial District



DATA INTERPRETATION FROM **2021 AND 2022** WEST AFRICAN SENIOR SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (WASSCE) STATISTICS PERFORMANCE OF GIRLS IN AKWA STATE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

2021 Performance by Senatorial Districts

The 2021 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) data for Akwa Ibom State revealed notable variations in academic performance across different senatorial districts and Local Government Areas (LGAs). The 2021 WASSCE data reflects better academic results in Akwa Ibom South senatorial district, with local government areas such as Ibeno, Eastern Obolo, Onna, Mbo, and Udung Uko leading the ranks of local governments where students performed best with passed percentages of 99.38%, 96.98%, 94.46%, 93.26%, and 92.08%, respectively.

The second senatorial district that followed was Akwa Ibom North West senatorial district, with local government areas like Ikot Ekpene (95.31%), Essien Udim (92.86%), and Obot Akara (91.97%), having the top three best performances. Relatively, Akwa Ibom North-East Senatorial District was the least performing district, with the following performances across some of the LGAs — Ibiono Ibom (91.56%), Itu (87.30%), and Nsit Ibom (86.24%).

2022 Performance by Senatorial Districts

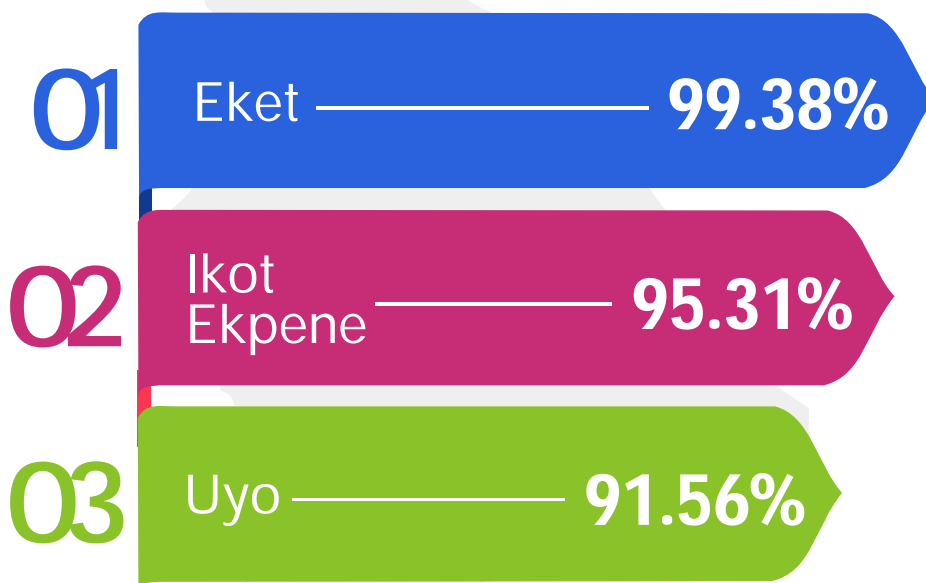
The 2022 West African Senior School Certificate Examination data for Akwa Ibom State reveals notable variations in academic performance across different senatorial districts and local government areas (LGAs). A breakdown of the findings — A total of 36,743 students sat for WASSCE in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State in 2022. Of this number, 19,615 were female. 71.72% of girls in Uyo failed the exam. This represents 1,664 girls. In Oron, 57.44% (278) failed the exam, and 540 also failed in Abak.

The 2022 WASSCE data for both male and female students in Akwa Ibom State reflect better academic results in Eket Senatorial district, with Local Government Areas such as Ibeno, Eastern Obolo, Onna, Mkpato Enin, and Eket leading the ranks of local governments where students performed best with passed percentages of 98.38%, 96.33%, 91.98%, 90.60%, and 82.05%, respectively.

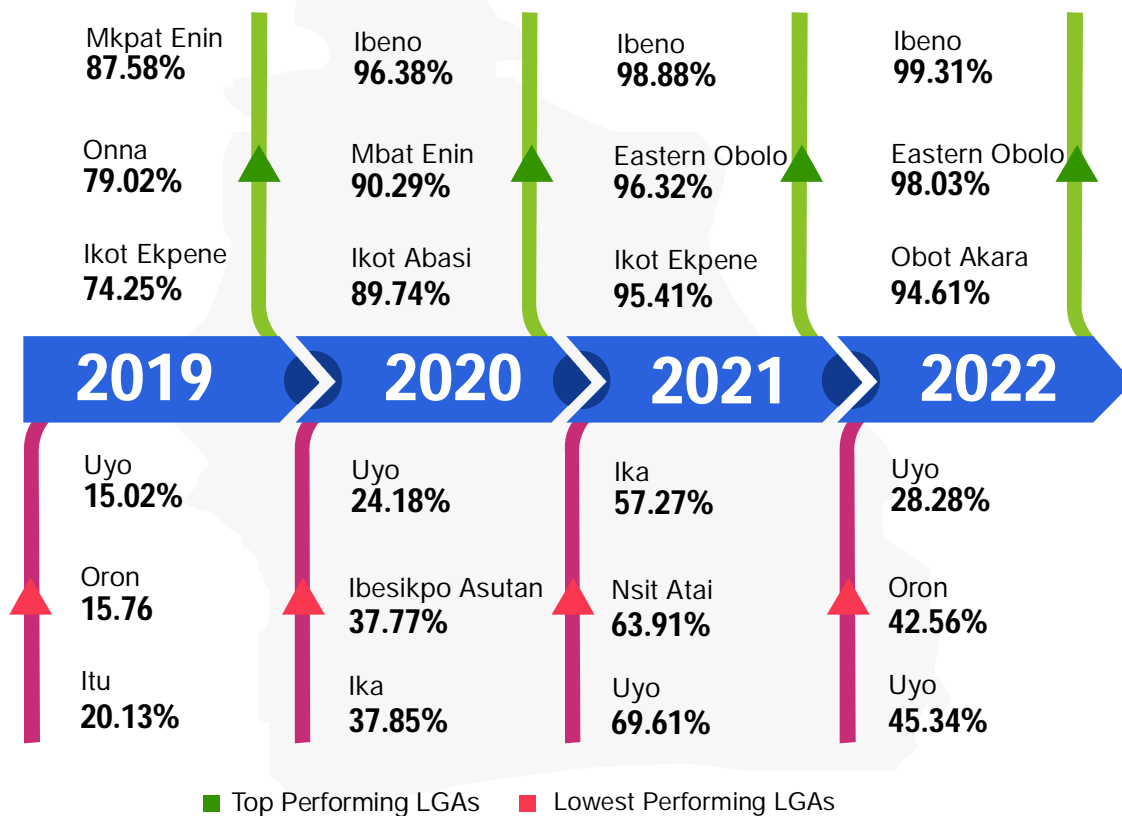
The second senatorial district that followed was Ikot Ekpene Senatorial District, with Local Government Areas like Obot Akara (95.14%), Ukanafun (90.11%), and Ikono (86.03%) having the top three best performances. Relatively, Uyo senatorial district was the least performing district with the following performance across some of the LGAs - Ibiono Ibom (84.33%), Nsit Ibom (78.48%), and Uruan (72.54%).

In summary, though the rural areas had low female student enrollment, they had the lowest failure rate, the suburban areas had greater amounts of female student enrollment but they followed closely behind the rural areas with greater amounts of failure rate. However, the urban areas had higher female students enrollment and they had the greatest failure rate for female students.

Fig. 12: Top Performance in the Zones



2019 TO 2022 FEMALE CANDIDATES WASSCE PERFORMANCE BASED ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS



Explanatory Notes

2019

In the 2019 WASSCE Examinations with focus on the performances of the female candidates, Mkpato ranked the highest performing LGA among the top three best performing LGAs in Akwa Ibom State with 87.58%, followed closely by Onna with 79.02% and Ikot Ekpenne with 74.25%.

Uruan and Ibeno emerged 4th and 5th best performing LGAs respectively. In contrast, Uyo emerged the least performing LGA closely followed by Oron, and Itu, with Ini and Nsit Ibom following.

In terms of overall performance at the local government level for both male and female students, Mkpato LGA performed best with 84.48% while Oron LGA had the poorest performance with 14.36%.

For Akwa Ibom state in 2019, the WASSCE result clearly showed that 49.76% of females passed the exam out of the 36,173 total number (male and female) that sat for the exam with the female students performing slightly better than their male counterparts who had a 47.83% performance.

2020

In the 2020 WASSCE Examinations with focus on the performances of the female candidates, Ibeno ranked the highest performing LGA among the top three best performing LGAs in Akwa Ibom State with 96.38%, followed closely by Mkpato with 90.29% and Mbo with 89.77%.

Ikot Abasi and Udung Uko emerged 4th and 5th best performing LGAs, respectively. In contrast, Uyo emerged the least performing LGA closely followed by Ibesikpo Asutan, and Ika, with Ukanafun and Nsit Aitai following.

In terms of overall performance at the local government level for both male and female students, Ibeno LGA performed best with 93.91% while Uyo LGA had the poorest performance with 26.98%.

For Akwa Ibom state in 2020, the WASSCE result clearly showed that 61.51% of females passed the exam out of the 34,428 total number (male and female) that sat for the exam with the female students performing slightly better than their male counterparts who had a 59.34% performance.

2021

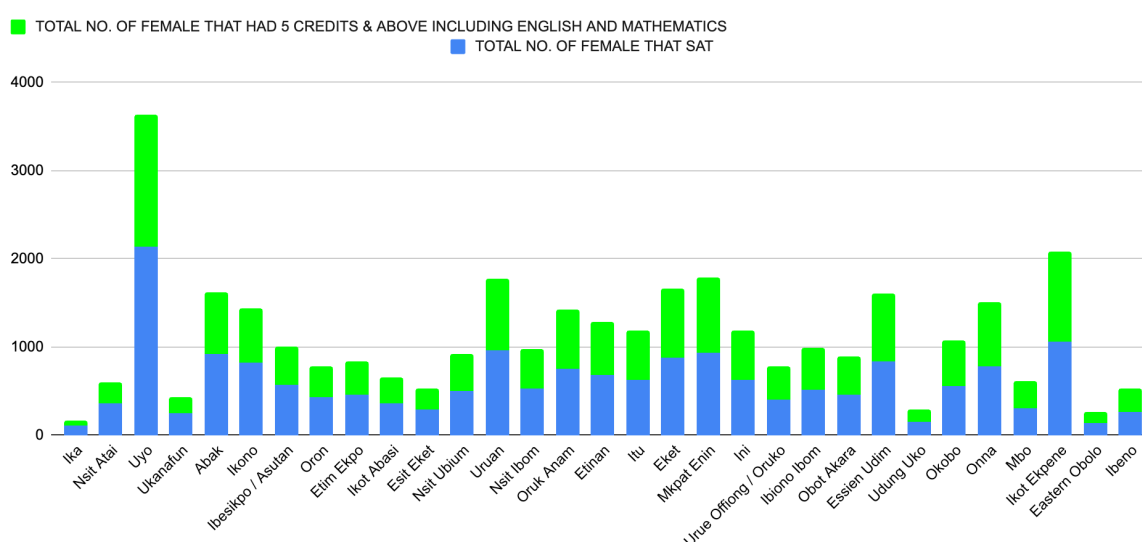
In the 2021 WASSCE results, specifically regarding female candidates' performance, Ibeno ranked the highest performing LGA among the top three best performing LGAs in Akwa Ibom State with 98.88%, followed by Eastern Obolo with 96.32% and Ikot Ekpenne with 95.41%.

Mbo and Onna ranked 4th and 5th best performing LGAs respectively. In contrast, Ika emerged the least performing LGA closely followed by Nsit Atai, and Uyo, with Ukanafun and Abak following.

In terms of overall performance at the local government level for both male and female students, Ibeno LGA performed best with 99.38% while Ika LGA had the poorest performance with 58.99%.

For Akwa Ibom state in 2021, the WASSCE result clearly showed that 84.29% of females passed the exam out of the 35,821 total number (male and female) that sat for the exam with male students performing slightly better than their female counterparts, with a percentage of 88.26% performance.

2021 WASSCE FEMALE CANDIDATES IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS PERFORMANCE



2022

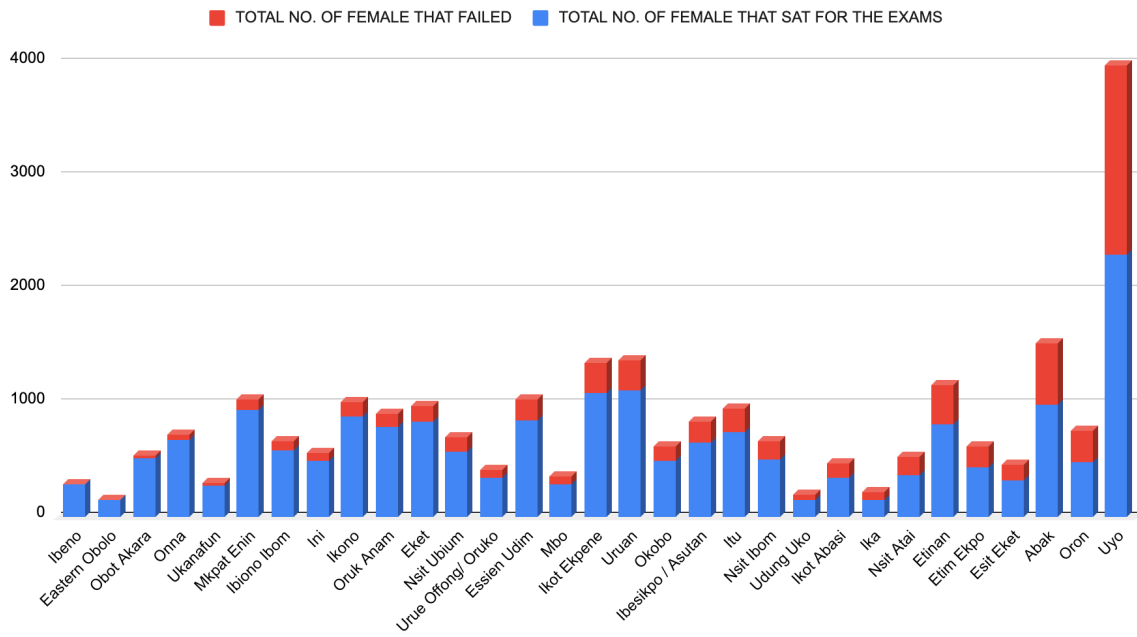
In the 2022 WASSCE results, regarding female candidates' performance, Ibeno ranked the highest performing LGA among the top three best performing LGAs in Akwa Ibom State with 99.31%, followed by Eastern Obolo with 98.03% and Obot Akara with 94.61%.

Onna and Ukanafun ranked 4th and 5th best performing LGAs respectively. In contrast, Uyo emerged the least performing LGA, followed by Oron, and Abak, with Esit Eket and Etim Ekpo following.

In terms of overall performance at the local government level for both male and female students, Ibeno LGA performed best with 98.38% while Uyo LGA had the poorest performance with 29.78%.

For Akwa Ibom state in 2022, the WASSCE result clearly showed that 69.72% of females passed the exam out of the 36,743 total number (male and female) that sat for the exam, with the female students performing slightly better than their male counterparts who had a 69.30% performance.

WASSCE STATISTICS FAILURE RATE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE 2022



Girls Academic Performance

The responses underscore the diversity of academic abilities among both male and female students. While some excel in specific subjects like science or reading, they may encounter challenges in others such as mathematics. This diversity highlights the importance of recognising and nurturing individual strengths and weaknesses to foster holistic educational development. There was a prevailing notion that girls are increasingly competitive academically and are even outperforming boys in certain instances. Instances are cited where female students secure top positions in classes and examinations, challenging conventional gender stereotypes and demonstrating their academic prowess. This trend reflects a shifting paradigm where girls are actively engaging and excelling in academic pursuits. Several participants highlighted the remarkable achievements of female students, challenging traditional gender stereotypes and demonstrating their academic prowess. This trend is attributed to the girls' dedication, determination, and focus on their studies, contrasting with the perceived lack of seriousness among some male students. Factors such as dedication to learning, avoidance of distractions, and a strong desire to succeed contribute to their academic achievements.

However, environmental and social influences may hinder the academic performance of female students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Factors such as poverty, lack of parental support, or involvement in social activities like cultism can adversely affect their educational journey. Some of the students interviewed were of the notion that adequate efforts were not made to help those that need academic support, it was also reported that there are limited opportunities for high flying students.

Teachers advocated for proactive measures to support poor-performing female students, suggesting the provision of extra lessons or lessons tailored to address their educational needs. Counselling and individualised attention were also suggested. This proactive approach aims to empower struggling students and provide them with the resources necessary to improve their academic standing. Teachers also emphasised the importance of encouragement, rewards, and disciplinary measures to motivate students to excel. Additionally, opportunities such as competitions and exposure to real-world experiences are seen as beneficial for enhancing students' skills and confidence. Despite challenges, including behavioural issues and varying academic abilities, efforts were made to provide a supportive environment conducive to academic success. Suggestions range from encouraging vocational training for students less inclined towards academics to fostering collaboration among students with diverse skill sets. Community involvement, such as sponsorships and mentorship programs, were highlighted as essential for empowering students and broadening their opportunities beyond the classroom. See some of the responses here;

“ We are not lagging behind. The girls are not lagging behind. For example, during the exams, the girls are always sitting quietly in front and we are always writing but the boys will make noise and cheat at the back. And when the result is out, the girls will come 1st, 2nd and 3rd position. ”

Student, Ikot Ekpene LGA

“ The performance could be determined by the different homes the children come from. Their background affects their performance. But the teachers here have really tried to help improve their performance. ”

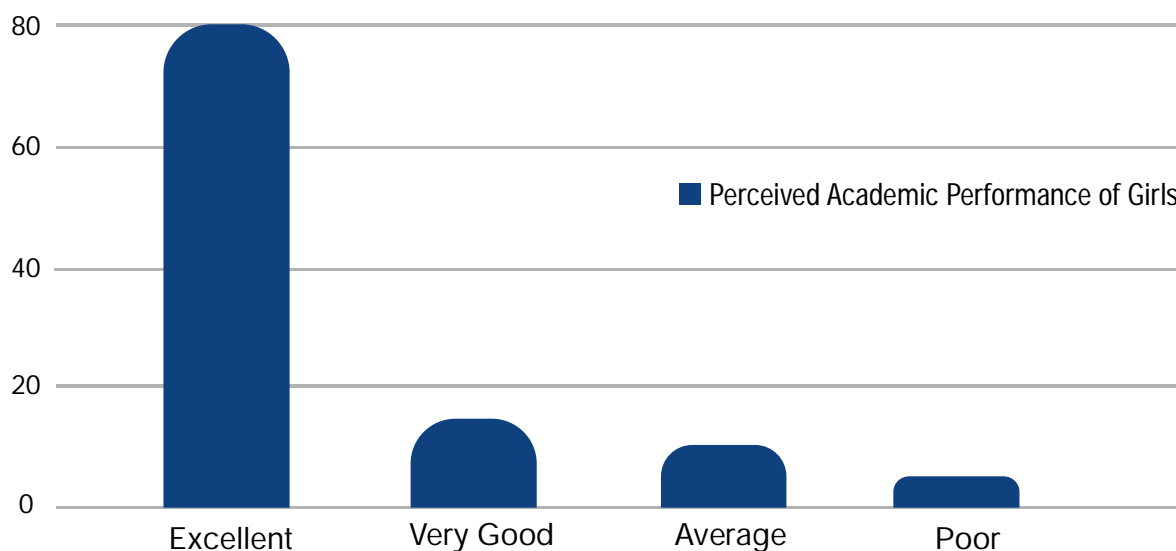
Civil Servant, Ikot Ekpene LGA

“ Let me tell you, in this school, and in most of the schools I have taught, the girls will come first, second, third, fourth and fifth, and then the boys will be following. So that's why I like to encourage female or girl child education. Because girls listen more while the boys, you know, the boys at the end, they will become Kandi Ikot (meaning unserious students) and they will be running outside, smoking. ”

Teaching Staff, Ikono LGA

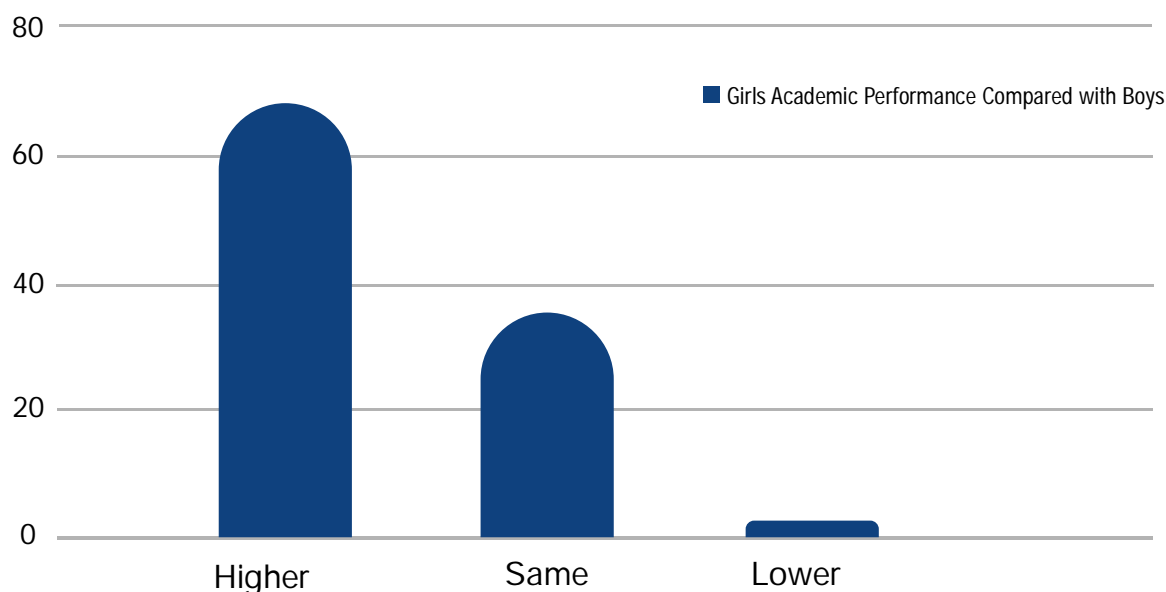
According to the survey done, the majority (80%) of girls were of the perception that girls have excellent academic performance. A significantly smaller proportion- 13.4%, 4.4%, and 2.2% had the view that girls having very good, average and poor academic performance respectively.

Fig. 13: Perceived Academic Performance of Girls



Comparing the academic performance of girls with boys, about two-thirds (65.4%) of the survey respondents were of the perception that girls have a higher performance than boys, 33.3% think the performance were similar a very few (1.6%) believed girls have lower academic performance compared to boys.

Fig. 14: Perceived Academic Performance of Girls Compared with Boys



Curriculum Review

The stakeholders interviewed affirmed the fact that the educational curriculum undergoes review, however, they were not able to provide a specific duration a curriculum uses before it is due for a review or the full process involved. A number of issues with the educational system were brought up in the interviews, especially in relation to the integration of sex and vocational education in the curriculum. In order to provide students with practical skills, participants emphasised the significance of implementing vocational training. To address girls' vulnerabilities, there was also a request for comprehensive sex education, particularly in rural areas. Access to the curriculum was identified as an issue of concern as compared to curriculum review by some stakeholders. Below are some of the responses:

“ I think the curriculum is reviewed regularly. I cannot really tell you exactly whether it is annually, but I know they normally review the curriculum, the contents.”

Civil Servant, Federal Ministry of Education

“ I don't think we have a problem with the curriculum, I think the question should be, how easy is it for us to access the curriculum? Is not the review or the update that is the problem here the national body in charge of the curriculum review is up and doing. I can speak for them. They are called NERDC, they are up to standard, they are not dormant, and they listen.”

Civil Servant, Federal Ministry of Education

“ In addition to what my colleague has just said, the educational system lacks teachers, okay? And the hygienic aspect of the girl child. When the curriculum was not so watered down, there used to be teachers on the sexual education, or sex education courses. These days, it is not even part of the timetable. And a lot of things have gone wrong. Because the girl child hardly knows how to take care of herself. It's very difficult for a girl child to take care of herself. So she has to be educated. And when they mix up with the boys like this, they seem to adapt or inherit a lot of other negative or adverse elements from these boys. Forgetting that their body constitution is not even the same as the boys. So, there's a lot of neglect on the girls' part taking care of themselves. So, they have to be educated more by hygiene or sexual education, which are no more in the school system. So, I wish something could be done concerning that particular aspect.”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

Gender Specific Issues

The gender-specific issues affecting girls' education, as highlighted in the interview responses, encompass various challenges. Unintended pregnancies emerge as a significant concern, often leading to school dropout as girls face societal pressures and stigma. The burden of pregnancy and its consequences disproportionately affects girls, as they face societal stigma and pressure while boys typically remain unaffected. Peer influence, particularly from boys, can also lead to early pregnancies and school dropout. Efforts to reintegrate pregnant girls back into the education system have been hindered by societal stigma and discrimination, despite policies aimed at facilitating their return. Moreover, the lack of parental support and awareness perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality in education. Cultural beliefs and practices were also reported to play a significant role, with some parents preferring to prioritize boys' education over girls', viewing girls as future homemakers rather than individuals with educational potential.

Early marriage emerged as a recurring concern, with its potential to disrupt girls' schooling and limit their future prospects. Instances of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in educational settings also create hostile environments that deter girls from attending school and negatively impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Additionally, issues like child labour and cultural norms were cited as perpetuating gender disparities in educational access and attainment. Despite these challenges, efforts to promote gender equality were evident, including initiatives to combat discriminatory practices and provide support for marginalised students. Respondents emphasised the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment where all students, regardless of gender, feel valued and empowered to succeed. Strategies such as parental engagement, financial assistance, and equitable disciplinary measures were proposed as means to address gender-based barriers and promote educational equity. While acknowledging the persistence of issues like bullying and sexual harassment, respondents underscored the need for proactive measures to ensure the safety and well-being of all students.

Efforts to address these gender-specific issues include initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in education, providing financial assistance and scholarships for girls, implementing comprehensive sexuality education programs, and strengthening child protection mechanisms to ensure the safety and well-being of all students. Additionally, respondents pointed to the fact that community engagement and advocacy play crucial roles in challenging harmful gender norms and fostering supportive environments that enable girls to access and thrive in education.

“ Most of them are. Because around the community, they don't even believe in sending these girls to school. Okay. So when they are coming to school, they are all coming with the mindset that we are supposed to be married out. So, they tend to send more boys to school than girls. Because they just believe they are a liability. So, when others marry them out, they are not. ”

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

“ I think most of the mothers now don't really see the education of these female students to be important because most of them have this understanding that she's up to 9, or 10. They will start telling her to bring her husband. When are you getting married? Are you not seeing your mate getting married? So that is the language. ”

Non-teaching Staff, Etim Ekpo LGA

SRHR Related Experience of Stakeholders

The responses underscore the interconnectedness of SRHR issues with educational outcomes and highlight the need for holistic approaches to promote the health, safety, and educational attainment of all students, particularly girls. One prevalent experience shared by the stakeholders is unintended pregnancy, which not only affects the physical health of young girls but also disrupts their education and future prospects. It often results in girls dropping out of school or facing stigma from their peers and communities. Early marriage, child labour and trafficking were cited as additional factors contributing to girls' disengagement from education. Lack of access to menstrual hygiene materials is another significant concern, leading to shame and embarrassment for girls and causing them to miss school during menstruation.

Instances of sexual abuse and harassment were also reported, with participants noting the psychological impact such experiences have on students' academic performance and emotional well-being. Few of the respondents gave accounts of girls being sexually assaulted by teachers or individuals posing as school authorities in the past, highlighting the need for vigilance and stringent measures to protect students from predatory behaviour. While some of the participants shared previous experiences; most of which did not occur within the school premises, however, was noticed by teachers at the school who brought the attention of parents and guardians to address the situation. Participants emphasised the importance of

creating a safe and supportive environment in schools as well as in communities, where students feel empowered to speak out against abuse and receive adequate support for their SRHR needs.

“ *In our school, we had a situation where one girl was raped when her mother sent her on an errand towards evening time. So, she was raped and that case was reported. Although the case did not go far, but we have situations like this where some bad boys take advantage of the vulnerable especially in the local area where parents can't take very good care of these children and sometimes they go out to hawk or do certain things and in the process they can fall victim, so it affects them badly.*”

Principal, Etim Ekpo LGA

“ *Sexual harassment by transporter like us are prominent about those wicked keke (tricycle) drivers, who has bad eyes for small girl child, Some keke driver even use touch and follow to lure this young students and rape them.*”

Driver, Uruan LGA

As regards menstrual health management, some students mention utilising resources like the menstrual bank in their school to manage menstruation, indicating a level of support within the institution. However, others share personal experiences of having to go home to change, suggesting a lack of adequate resources or support at school for managing menstruation effectively. This discrepancy highlights potential gaps in the school's ability to address the needs of its students comprehensively.

The responses regarding sexual education and life skills vary across different perspectives and experiences. Several participants noted a lack of formal provision for sexuality education and life skills in the school curriculum. Reasons cited include the absence of such topics from the curriculum and a general lack of focus on these critical areas. Some teachers make an effort to create awareness about sexuality education and give SRHR related talks in-between their regular classes to fill in this gap. While some mentioned that sexual education is provided by voluntary organisations, it indicates a potential reliance on external entities rather than internal curriculum integration. This reliance on external support may not ensure consistent and standardised delivery of essential education on sexuality and life skills. Some participants reported being part of clubs in school where sexual education is provided.

“ *What I have here is that as a teacher, I make sure I create awareness of sex education to them mostly. So that they know themselves and also be able to guide themselves so that they can still continue their education and finish up on time.*”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

Prevention of Sexual Harassment

Empowering girls through education was seen as pivotal in breaking down barriers and fostering a safer environment. Initiatives like the Family Empowerment and Youth Reorientation Program (FEYREP) were applauded for their role in addressing rape cases effectively, signalling a commitment from the government to tackle these issues head-on. Institutional measures play a crucial role in preventing and addressing sexual harassment. Disciplinary actions, including dismissal and legal consequences, were emphasised as deterrents for both teachers and students. Vigilance among educators, enforcement of dress codes, and adherence to civil service rules were highlighted as important preventive measures utilised within school settings. Additionally, the importance of creating sexual awareness among students and providing self-defence classes to equip them with tools to protect themselves is underscored. Beyond institutional responses, there is a call for broader societal interventions. Participants emphasised the need to address underlying issues causing gender-based violence and direct engagement with male perpetrators of harassment. Counselling, awareness campaigns, and community involvement were suggested as complementary approaches to fostering a culture of respect and safety. While efforts were made to educate students about gender issues and premature sex through external seminars, it underscores the need for more comprehensive and integrated approaches within the school system itself.

Guidance and Counselling

The stakeholders highlighted the importance of comprehensive guidance and counselling services in schools to support students' academic performance, personal growth and wellbeing. They emphasised the importance of providing personalised support and mentorship to students, particularly those who may struggle academically or face challenges outside the classroom. This includes mixing students of different academic levels within classes, offering extra lessons, and providing continuous counselling to address individual needs and promote holistic development. While some schools acknowledged the provision of guidance and counselling, others highlighted the absence of dedicated counsellors or professionals trained in this field. Instances of part-time teachers or individuals without formal training fulfilling counselling roles were mentioned, indicating a gap in the provision of specialised support for students.

Participants emphasised the importance of intrinsic motivation and interest in learning, noting that some students lack the drive to improve and merely attend classes to progress to the next level. Various methods were mentioned for identifying students in need of counselling within the school context. These include observing their behaviour in class, such as sleeping or mood changes to identify any form of disengagement, punctuality and absenteeism rates. Teachers also look for physical cues, such as appearance. Additionally, during specific periods like WAEC registration, students seeking guidance on subjects and career choices. Students who are not living with their parents were also identified as a vulnerable group to be prioritised for counselling. The importance of counselling, particularly from female counsellors who can

better understand and address the needs of girls was emphasised as a means of providing holistic support. Some participants reported that systems are in place for addressing specific needs, such as providing menstrual hygiene products through the counsellor. Despite teachers' efforts to provide counselling and encouragement, there is a recognition that students themselves need to actively engage in their education and demonstrate a willingness to learn.

Moreover, the discussions highlighted the role of educators in acting as counsellors and mentors to students. Teachers are encouraged to foster positive relationships with students, show empathy, and actively engage in counselling activities alongside dedicated counselling staff. There were also calls for improvement and expansion of counselling services, including the suggestion to involve external counsellors or experts to supplement existing resources. Concerns were raised about the capacity of current counselling arrangements to adequately address the diverse needs of students, particularly in larger schools where the demand for counselling support may exceed available resources. Efforts to promote gender equality and empower female students through education were emphasised, with a focus on addressing societal barriers and providing mentorship to encourage girls to pursue their educational aspirations.

“ We provide guidance and counselling, though we don't really have a guidance expert in the school. _____ ”
School Administrator, Eastern Obolo LGA

“ I think the government should encourage this aspect of education, the counselling aspect. At least in each school, we shouldn't have less than three to four counselors that can go around to talk to the students so that they know areas they should. I think we have one. I'm saying we should have more so that we have a population of maybe 1,000 students, only one counsellor. They would not be able to cover it all. So I think that would also be good.” _____ ”
Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

“ What we should do is that we should have a good counsellor. For some of these children, we don't really know what they are facing at home, some of them are facing sexual harassment and they cannot really say it out. They're even looking for someone to confide in. And so you see a child just so quiet we don't know what that child is passing through. So we need a female counsellor in the school, that will counsel this child. And we also want the teachers also to be friendly, to be friendly with these children. They should not maltreat them and let them go like that. When you see a child in a particular situation, try to find out what is wrong. _____ ”
Non-Teaching Staff, Etim Ekpo LGA

Involvement of Girls in Extra-Curricular Activities

The responses described the active involvement of girls in various extracurricular activities, demonstrating their diverse interests and talents beyond academic pursuits. Girls were reported to participate enthusiastically in sports like football, handball, volleyball, and athletics, often excelling and competing on par with their male counterparts. Additionally, cultural activities, debate clubs, young farmers, jet club, home economics practicals, and dramatic performances provide avenues for self-expression and skill development. Beyond traditional classroom learning, these activities serve as avenues for holistic development. Participants emphasised that such activities are not merely recreational but play a significant role in enhancing the overall quality of education. For instance, engaging in sports like javelin, volleyball, and basketball is believed to promote physical fitness and mental alertness among female students. Besides physical fitness, extracurricular activities were described to provide opportunities for mental relaxation and creative expression. To ensure female engagements in some schools, female sport groups were created when males and females cannot be placed in the same group, for instance, football, handball and javelin.

Moreover, there was a recognition that not all students excel academically, but they may possess talents in other areas like sports, which should be nurtured. Despite some challenges such as inadequate resources or dominance by boys in certain sports like football, girls actively engage in a wide range of activities, contributing to their personal growth and the overall vibrancy of school life. In this context, support from external stakeholders, such as NGOs or philanthropic individuals, is seen as crucial. Their sponsorship of extracurricular activities can significantly enrich the educational experience, providing resources and opportunities that may otherwise be lacking. This support extends beyond mere financial assistance; it signifies a collective commitment to promoting well-rounded education and empowering girls to explore their full potential.

“ We do a lot of extracurricular activities like inter house sports. We have the female football team, the male football team, basketball, male and female. So I'm thinking both the male and the female students are taking active part in extracurricular events like the inter house sports, some excursions or activities outside the class like quiz competitions. We try to do gender balance, bringing male and female in all these activities. There's some extracurricular activities that male tend to dominate, but we encourage females like in football, We try to open up a team for the females and we encourage the females to have their own team.”

Vice Principal, Etim Ekpo LGA

Student Healthcare

Based on observation and stakeholders' reports, the healthcare provision in schools needs urgent attention to bridge the gaps noted. More than half (56%) of the schools visited do not have a health unit, 32% had a sick bay/health clinic while 12% had first aid boxes. Majority of those with healthcare units have major needs as they are not well equipped (See fig. 9 and 10 for further details). In cases where schools lacked a dedicated medical facility or personnel, principals often took proactive measures to ensure students received appropriate care. This included arranging transportation to nearby health centres or clinics and covering the associated expenses. Additionally, there were mentions of partnerships with external healthcare providers to facilitate timely referrals and treatments for students in need. In some cases, the parents are contacted, or the students are taken home when they fall ill in school. First aid boxes are present in many schools to treat minor emergencies, some of which are well equipped while others are poorly or not equipped. Most schools do not have a functional sick bay or school clinic., only a few have a standard sick bay. Teachers and school administrators assess the student in need of healthcare to determine if first aid is administered, they are taken to a nearby hospital or sent home for proper care. Some schools have trained health personnels while others do not; dedicated teachers, especially house masters are responsible for healthcare. Inadequate healthcare facilities were reported to be peculiar with public schools as private schools have better structures to address medical issues in schools. Despite challenges, efforts were made to prioritise students' health and safety, with some educators leveraging their own expertise in first aid to support students when necessary. Collaboration with parents also played a crucial role, with schools coordinating closely with families to ensure students received adequate care and support when faced with health-related issues.

“*The government gave us a first aid box, but we don't have a personnel that actually takes care of the children when they have little problem, so what I do here is whenever a child falls sick, or has fever, or has stomach pains, and reports, I quickly direct the child to the health centre, and will attach a staff and student that will take the child there, and I will foot the bill.*”

School Administrator, Eastern Obolo LGA

“*Well, we have the First Aid Box where we equip it with some first aid materials to attend to certain emergencies, like if there's an injury sustained by a student while playing or doing some work, we can attend to that. At the same time, we don't have health facilities to attend to students. If any student develops a sickness that is beyond our control, we allow the student to go home or get the student to a nearby clinic so that the parent can attend to him/her.*”

School Administrator, Etim Ekpo LGA

““ *When there is an injury or a student is sick, actually what we do is, the principal will order for the compound master. So, the compound master will now take the child to the nearest health centre for quick treatment. We don't have a sick bay, we have a nearby health centre.*””
 School Administrator, Okobo LGA

““ *The first aid box should not be for schools that have six thousand learners. When I went to this school opposite, I asked the principal how she solves her medical problem, she said she uses the health centre beside the school. And I like that, she is lucky. But how many schools are lucky, that is the problem. Only if they have something like that close to all the schools. Sometimes, I ask other principals, how do you make your referrals, they are always lost because they don't have an answer to them. This is peculiar to the public schools, if you go to private schools they are trying and they listen even when you suggest some things to them, they try to change.”*”
 Educationist, Federal Ministry of Education

Fig. 15: Health Unit Available in Schools

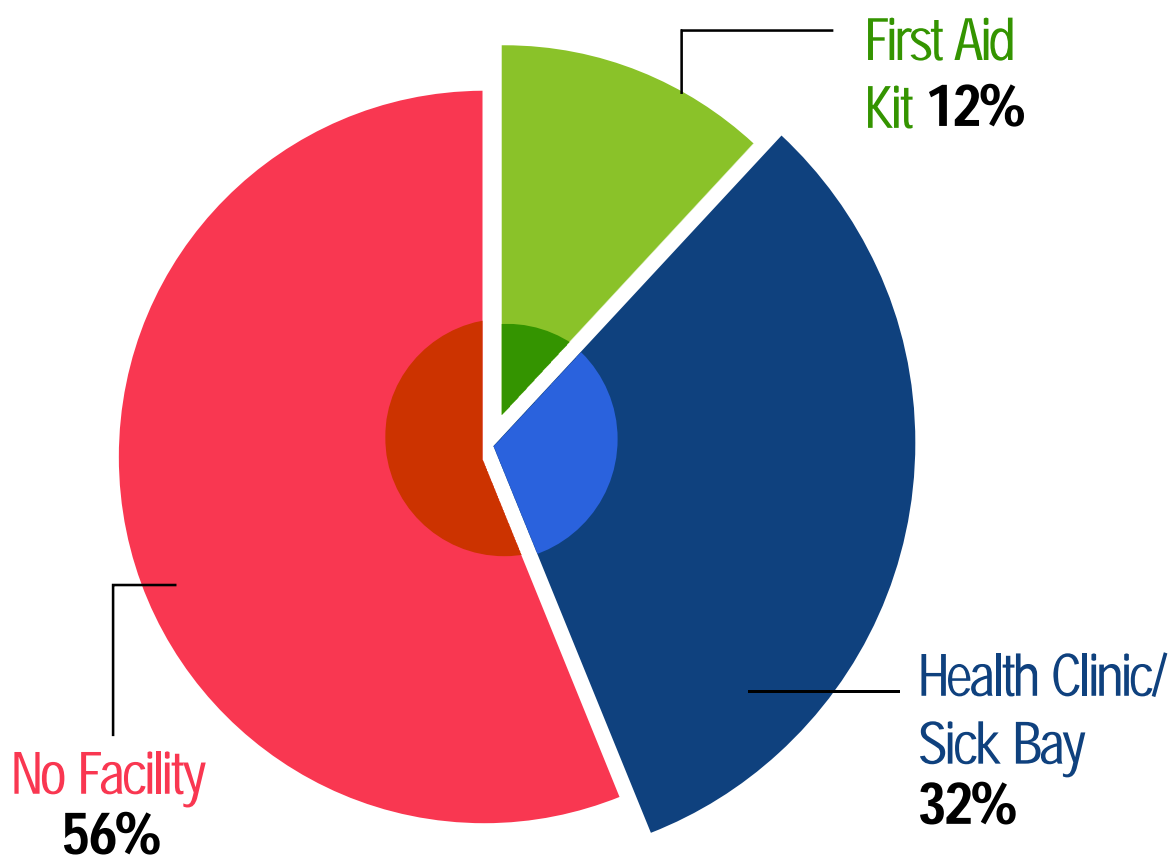
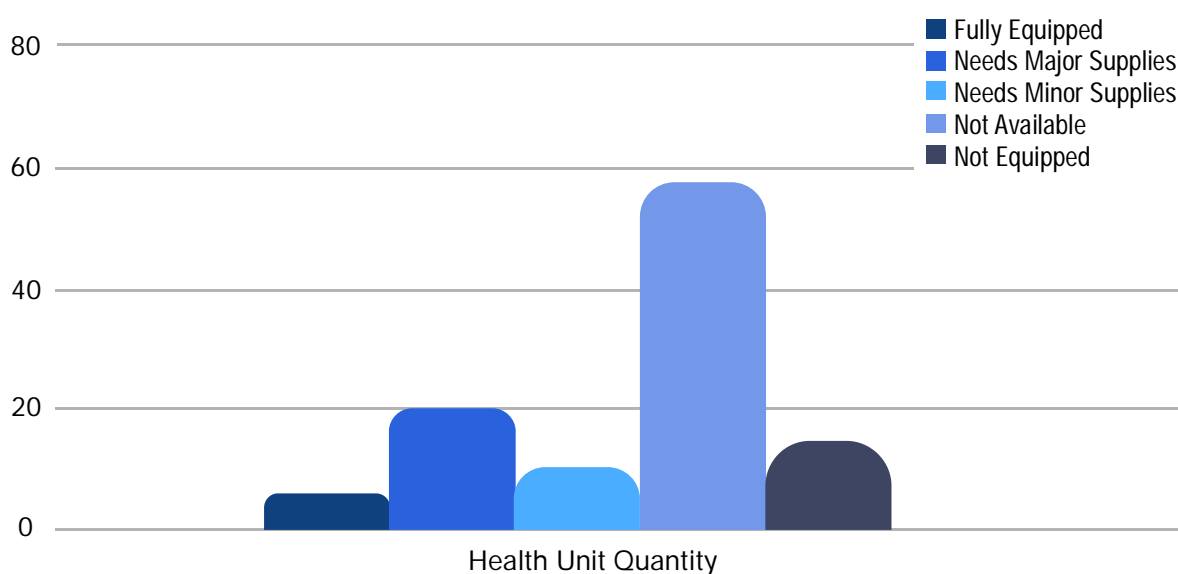


Fig. 16: Quality of the Health Unit



WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Facilities

Majority (72%) of the schools visited had a bore-hole as their source of water, 12% make use of pipe borne water and another 12% had no source of water. Among those with a water source, just above two-thirds (68%) have clean and drinkable water, 28% had no running water and 4% had dirty water that is not fit for drinking (See fig. 11 & 12 for more). Students were actively involved in maintaining cleanliness through tasks like fetching water and cleaning, indicating a participatory approach to hygiene. Moreover, there's a recognition of gender-specific concerns, particularly regarding the hygiene needs of girls. According to some respondents, the school provides cleaning materials for the students to use and in some cases, they are asked to come with cleaning materials during resumption, particularly, boarding students. Emphasis was placed on providing facilities like sanitary pads and separate sanitation facilities to address these specific needs and vulnerabilities. Traditional gender roles influenced the perceptions of responsibility, with maintenance tasks often assigned to females while provision was seen as a male responsibility. Sanitary prefect, utility prefect, labour prefect and compound masters/mistress were reported to supervise WASH facilities in schools, the Local Education coordinator was also reported to oversee sanitation during inspection.

The availability of clean water in schools contributes to overall health and prevents disease outbreaks. According to some respondents, the presence of WASH facilities in schools has led to increased enrollment, especially among young girls of menstruating age, who benefit from menstrual hygiene facilities, ensuring they do not miss school due to menstruation-related issues. Nonetheless, some schools face significant infrastructure challenges, including the lack of running water, functional toilets, and sanitation facilities. These challenges not only impact hygiene standards but also pose health risks to students.

Efforts to address WASH needs in Akwa Ibom State have been supported by partnerships with

entities like UNICEF and the state government. Counterpart funding support has enabled the provision of water facilities and hygiene maintenance in selected local government areas. Notably, Obot Akara has been certified as open defecation free due to the provision of water facilities and toilets. The focus extends beyond primary schools to include secondary schools, with attention given to the specific needs of girls and persons with disabilities. However, challenges such as funding shortages and issues of vandalism, theft, and abandonment of facilities have hindered the sustainability of WASH interventions. Despite these challenges, efforts have been made to tailor WASH facilities to suit the terrain, population size, and specific needs of communities. This includes considerations for gender segregation in sanitation facilities to ensure the safety and security of girls, addressing concerns of sexual harassment and promoting equitable access to facilities.

“ *Our toilets, water, and sanitation facilities are in good condition.* ”
Teaching Staff, Eket LGA

“ *Well, girl child, or girl children are prone to infection and their convenience should properly be washed except the school has people that do that but every girl child should equally wash her own hand to avoid contacting Infection.* ”
Pharmacist, Etim Ekpo LGA

“ *One of the major challenges we have in this Iko town is that we don't have a toilet facility in this school. In a school where we have girls, you know boys can easily go beside a bush and do the thing. But you understand that the women will need somewhere hidden where they can go and ease themselves with comfort. But we don't have such a place here. So, it's a problem. If the government can help us erect a convenience here that can accommodate both the boys and the girls, I think we would really appreciate it.* ”
Teaching Staff, Eastern Obolo LGA

“ *We have WASH policy for schools. It is made compulsory that every school must have water and be connected to the national grid for electricity wherever that is possible. And in most of our schools, we have borehole water provided so that the students use that to flush their toilet. Where we do not have a borehole the management provides large tanks where water is stored for the children to use.* ”
Civil Servant, Zonal Director of Education

Fig. 17: Source of Clean Water Available in the School

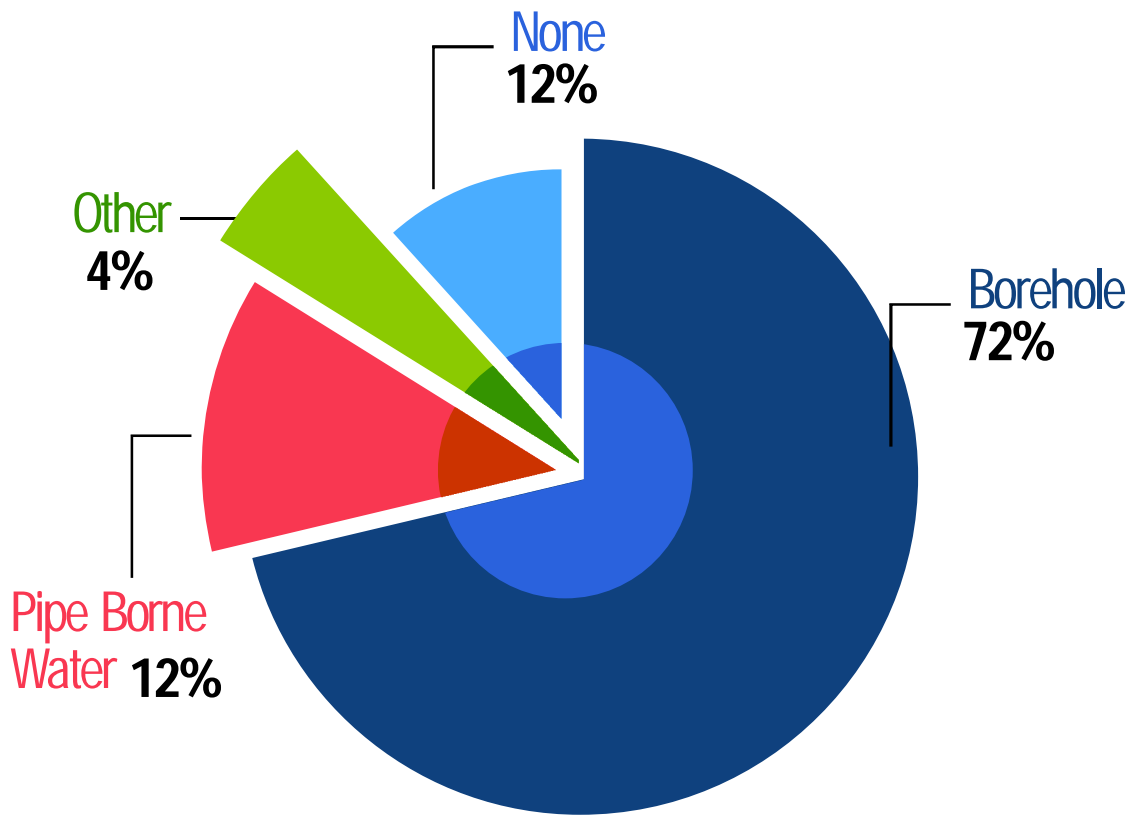
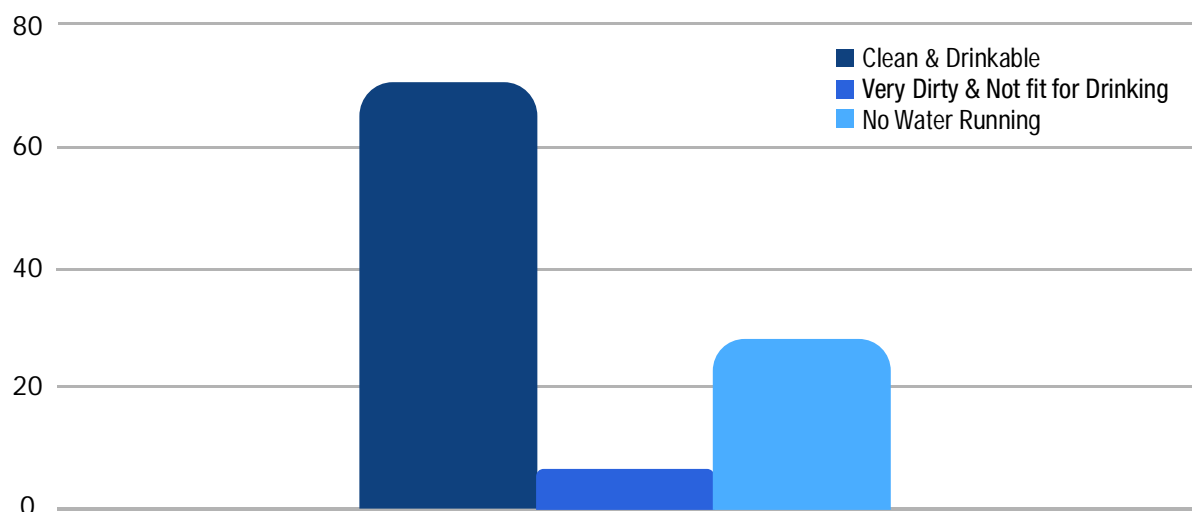


Fig. 18: Quality of Water from Water Source



Cleaning

Students were reported to be actively involved in the management of school cleanliness and sanitation. They are involved in maintaining the cleanliness of the school compound, undertaking tasks such as grass cutting, weeding, cleaning classrooms, washing toilets, and sweeping. Some schools had designated days for compound cleaning, while others integrated it into the daily routine, often emphasising it as a form of physical exercise and responsibility-building for students. However, there were variations in approaches, with some schools relying solely on student efforts, while others hired external workers or used mowers for more extensive tasks like grass cutting. Additionally, challenges were highlighted, such as limited resources for monitoring and transportation, which hindered the ability of designated officials to effectively oversee cleanliness activities across schools.

“*The cleaning of the school is managed by the school administration. We use students. The government does not provide cleaners. So, we use students to keep the school clean and tidy and that is what the school administration is doing.*” _____

School Administrator, Etim Ekpo LGA

“*Many times, we don't engage them. Some of these things have to do with physical and very strenuous work so we engage a mower to cut the grass for us and we pay other people manually to work for us.*” _____

Teaching Staff, Ikot Ekpene LGA

“*Like we hear every day that if you do not exercise you are liable to die young. We need exercise for our bodies. So our children take part in cleaning the compound and cutting the grass but not too much because we have big fields in our schools here and we know that our children cannot keep those fields well-kept so what the school do is that they higher mowers to cut the grass, but it does not end there they still leave small portions because the student need to do compound work they need to exercise that is why we have compound masters and compound mistresses in all the schools. The children weed, clean, wash their toilet, sweep their classrooms, and remove cobwebs. They do all necessary manual work that is healthy for the children.*” _____

Civil Servant, Zonal Director of Education

Waste Disposal

Respondents highlighted concerns and suggestions regarding waste management in schools, particularly addressing the handling of menstrual waste and the need for waste sorting and disposal procedures. There was a focus on the specific challenges posed by menstrual waste disposal, particularly in mixed-gender schools where girls' waste streams differ due to menstruation. Concerns were raised about the lack of awareness among students

regarding proper disposal methods for sanitary towels, with some resorting to improper disposal practices like throwing them into regular waste bins. While incineration was proposed as a potential solution, concerns about its feasibility and health implications were raised, indicating the need for further consideration and exploration of alternative disposal options. Some respondents emphasised on educating students, particularly girls, about proper waste disposal practices, such as wrapping used pads and segregating waste for burning. Suggestions include providing waste bins with lids in every classroom and implementing daily burning of certain types of waste to maintain cleanliness and hygiene. There was a call for waste sorting at the point of generation, with a focus on separating biodegradable waste for composting and recyclable materials like paper and cardboard for sale. This approach not only promotes environmental sustainability but also provides economic opportunities for schools and communities.

“ “ *There should be a waste bin with a lid in every classroom, the waste should be separated, it is not all waste that is for the bin, like used pads. Girls menstruating should carry extra paper to wrap the pads and this waste should be burnt daily.* ” ”
Civil Servant, Min. of Environment

“ “ *I've always advocated for waste sorting at the point of generation. Now you've mentioned girls school. Girls are peculiar, peculiar in the sense that their waste stream is going to be a little bit more different than what you would have in an all boys school or in a mixed school. Why? Because the female child is going to menstruate and handling their sanitary towel has been an issue. Some don't know what to do with it., and I don't know whether secondary school education is even creating awareness on how it should be handled. In those days when they had pit toilets, it was easy, they just dumped it into the pit toilet. These days I don't think it's as easy as that. Some even package it and just throw it into the normal waste stream of the school, which is not altogether good.”* ” ”
Civil Servant, Min. of Environment

Toilet Facilities

More than a quarter (28%) of the schools visited practiced open defecation, 52% had pit toilets and 24% had gravity flush toilets. Only 16% of the toilets identified were rated good, 12% and 36% needed major and minor repairs respectively while 20% were totally unusable. This explains the strong preference expressed by the interview participants for using facilities in their homes over those available in schools or public spaces. This preference often stems from concerns about cleanliness, the availability of water, and the overall condition of the facilities. Some respondents point out specific deficiencies in school toilets, such as inadequate cleaning practices, insufficient water supply, and overall poor maintenance. There was also an acknowledgment of the disparity between public and private toilet facilities, with expectations for cleanliness and upkeep varying significantly. Some indicate the absence of toilets altogether in their school, while others mention the presence of toilets but emphasised

that they do not meet standard requirements. Concerns about the sanitation and hygiene of school toilets were raised, with references made to locally made facilities that may not meet international standards. Additionally, respondents highlight the importance of water facilities in ensuring the effectiveness of toilets. The numbers and the narrative report confirms the need to urgently address the poor toilet facilities available in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom state. Here are few of the responses;

“ *The pit is for the children. We have a water system for the teachers.* ”
 School Administrator, Okobo LGA

“ *We need international standards, we don't just construct the thing and leave it we are operating on current practices, in each of the sanitation facilities, there are wash hand basins and also chemicals to clean your hands after that, the sanitary items attached, they are all there, provided locked and key. You understand, so that people can just break in during or when the school is not in session. So, it's locked and secure. community will provide security to ensure that nothing is stolen.* ”
 Civil Servant, RUWASA-AKS

Fig. 19: Type of toilet available in school

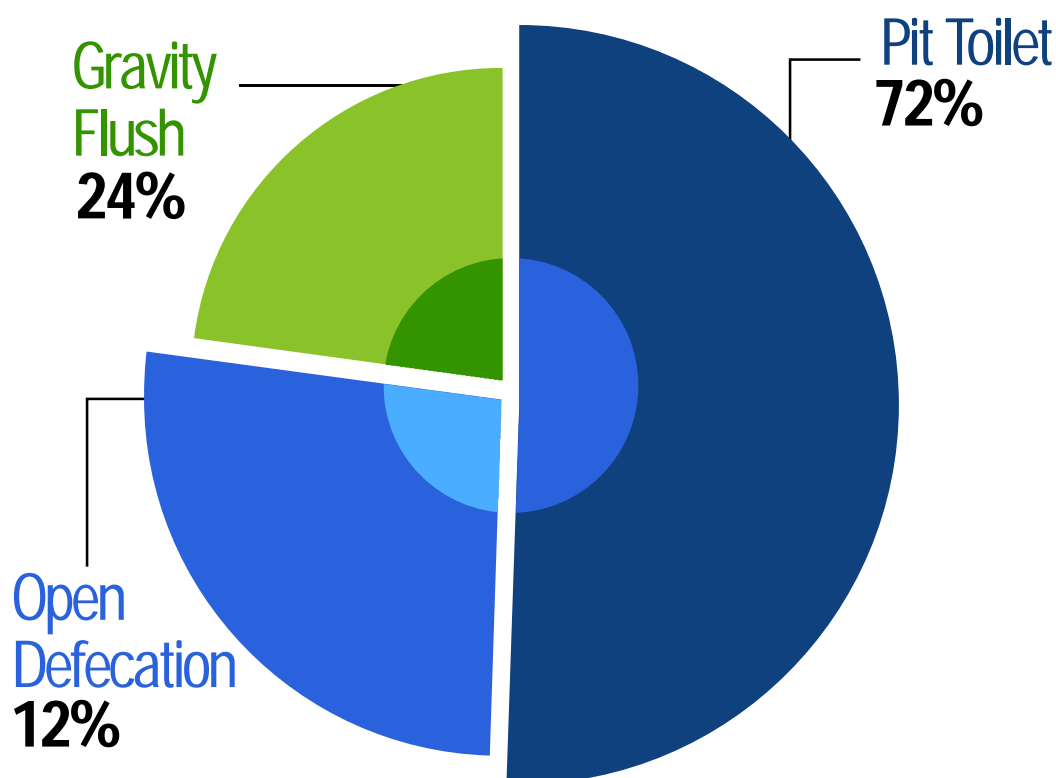
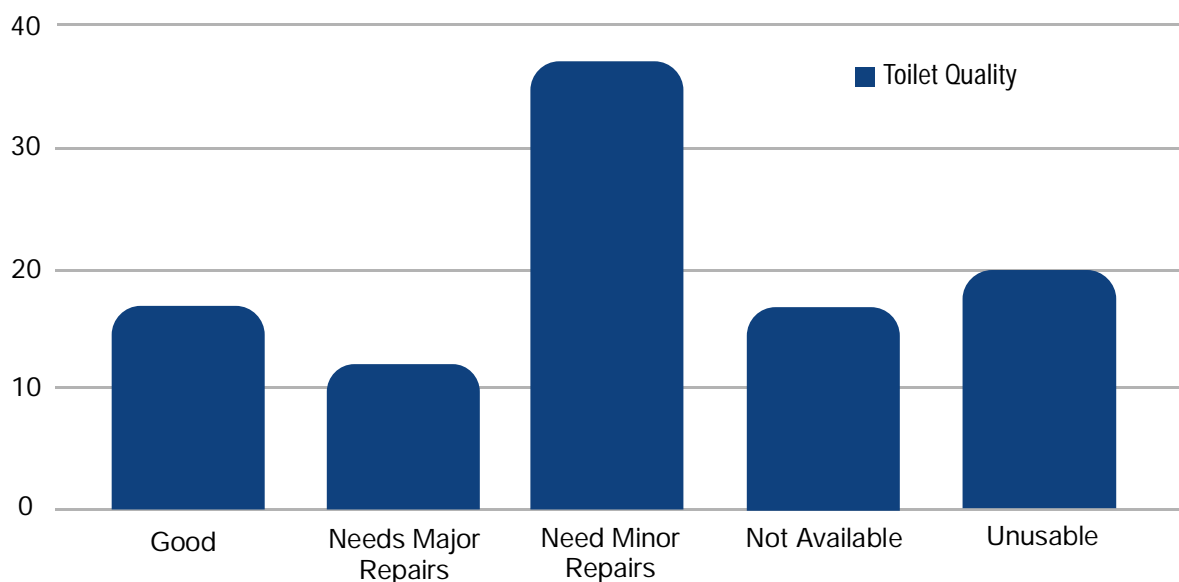


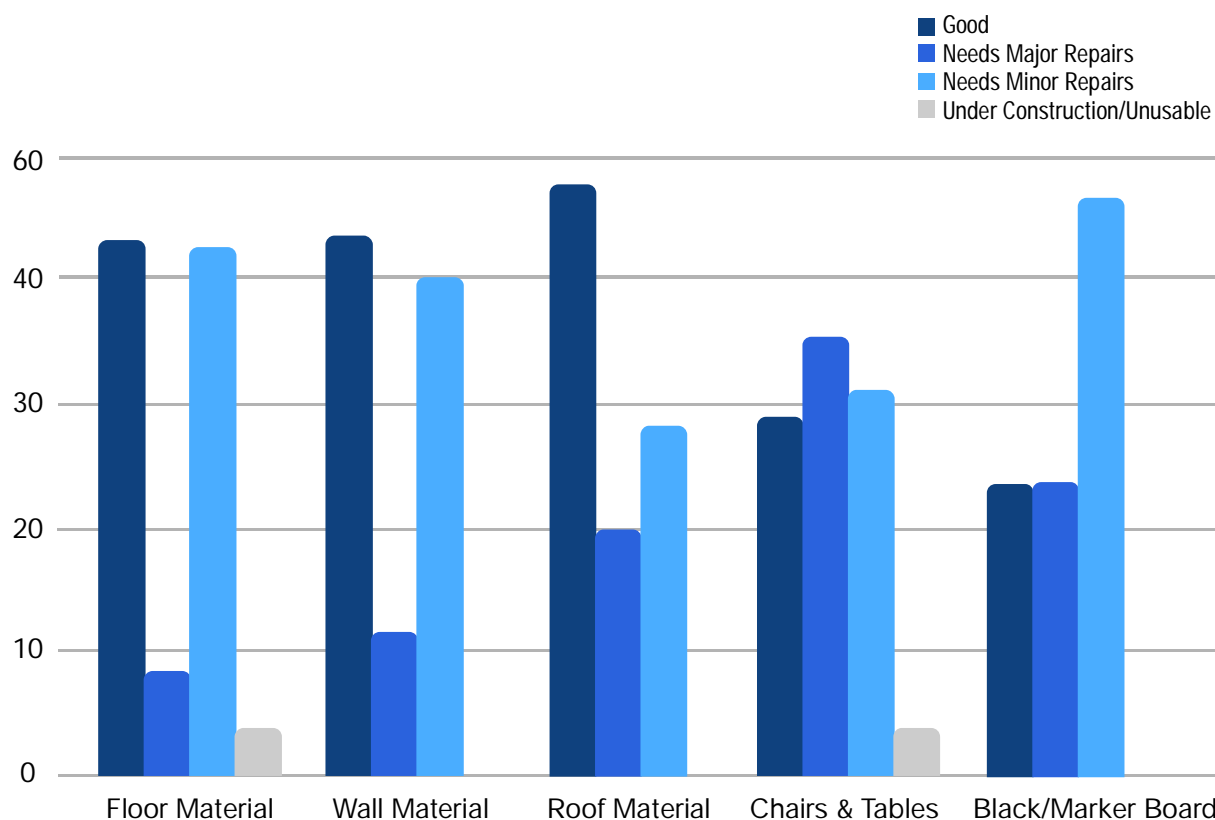
Fig. 20: Quality of Toilet(s) Available in the School



School Resources

The responses from various discussions and interviews shed light on the challenges and deficiencies in the education infrastructure of Akwa Ibom State. Participants highlighted issues such as inadequate facilities, including a shortage of chairs, learning aids, and functioning libraries. The lack of essential amenities like proper toilets, sanitary pads, and clean water further exacerbates the difficulties faced by students, particularly girls, in maintaining hygiene and comfort in schools. Moreover, concerns were raised about the quality of infrastructure, with mentions of locally made, sub-standard facilities that fail to meet the needs of students effectively. Participants emphasized the critical role of modern libraries, laboratories, and ICT blocks in facilitating quality education. However, the prevailing conditions often fall short of providing a conducive learning environment, hindering students' academic performance and overall development. Fig. 15 presents the need for repairs in many of the school facilities. Fig. 17 to 20 describes further the availability and state of other school resources observed during the data collection period.

Fig. 21: Quality of Classrooms

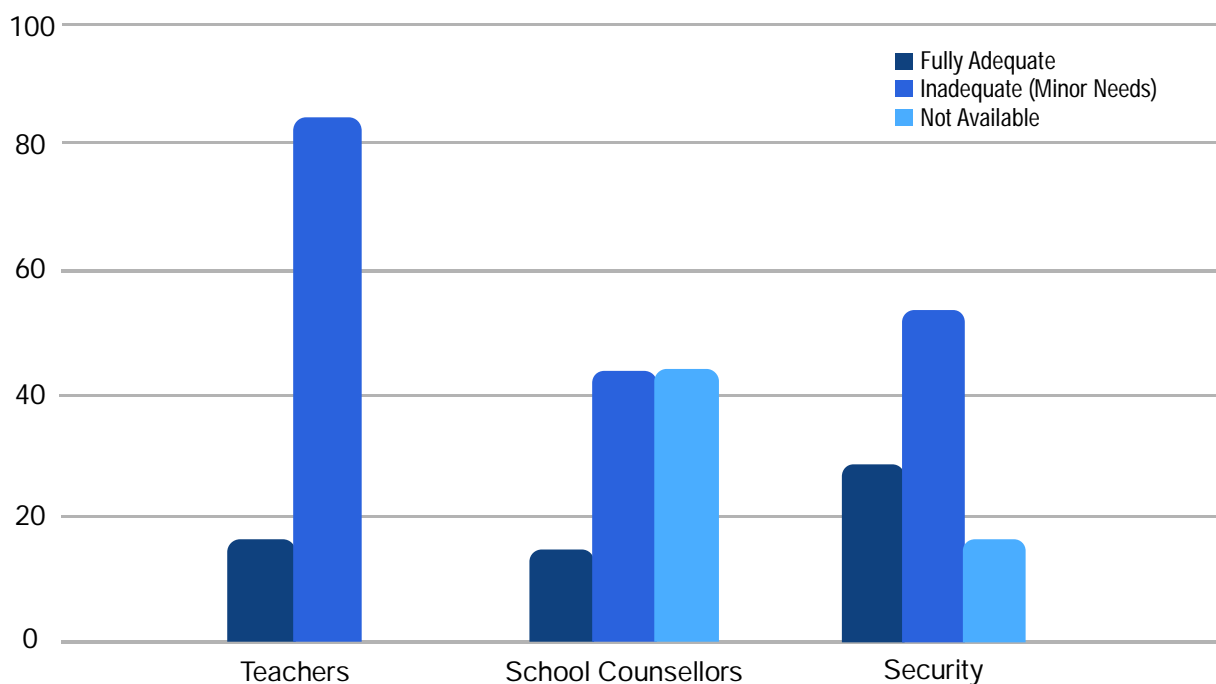


Based on the responses, there seems to be gender equality in the teaching and management team in schools. Across different schools, there appears to be a trend of more female teachers than male teachers, particularly in subjects like Biology and Integrated Science. However, there are instances where certain subjects have more male teachers, such as Mathematics and Physics. In terms of school management, the gender balance varies. While some schools have more female principals and vice principals, others have a majority of male members in their management committees. Additionally, there are cases where specific roles within the school, such as treasurers or secretaries, are predominantly held by females.

Generally, respondents reported the presence of qualified teachers in schools, however, the lack of some teachers was reported in some schools. Challenges related to staffing were highlighted, including difficulties in replacing transferred teachers and the absence of certain subject specialists like mathematics teachers. One respondent emphasised the importance of comprehensive support staff, including librarians, lab attendants, and security personnel, to ensure the smooth functioning of schools. The lack of essential facilities like libraries and computer labs in many schools poses challenges to effective teaching and learning. Another perspective highlights the need for a standardized model of education across schools, including the provision of essential facilities like clinics, hostels, and laboratories. The reintroduction of dormitories for boarding students is suggested to create a conducive learning environment and alleviate the burden on day students. Despite these challenges, efforts are being made by school administrators to address deficiencies in facilities and

equipment, such as toilets and laboratory equipment, to ensure a conducive learning environment for students. Fig. 16 showed that schools are in need of adequate teachers, and other human resources like counselors and security guards as some schools do not have them at all.

Fig. 22: Availability of Human Resources in Schools



While efforts are being made by the government to improve educational facilities, including the establishment of model schools with comprehensive amenities, challenges persist. The need for sustained investment in infrastructure, such as libraries, laboratories, and security measures, is underscored to enhance the quality of education and ensure the safety of students and school property. Additionally, calls were made for the reintroduction of practical subjects like agriculture and physical education to enrich the curriculum and promote holistic development among students. Despite the contributions made by the government and educational authorities, financial constraints and instances of mismanagement pose significant hurdles to addressing the infrastructure deficits adequately. Furthermore, there are concerns about the misuse and abuse of resources provided by the government, with instances of theft and neglect of school infrastructure. Despite government investments in education, there are calls for more accountability and effective utilization of resources to address the needs of students and ensure quality education for all.

““ *In the aspect of committed and trained teachers, we have them more now. It is expected that students are supposed to improve. We have problems with infrastructures, poor working environment, and poor motivation. So, it's not really balancing up.*” ”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

“When you talk about all these facilities, the government is trying but we have not yet gotten there. Right now the current governor is talking about model schools, so most of these facilities you are talking about, you will find them more in model schools. You will hardly find a school here with a sick bay, but there is first-aid box.”

Civil Servant, SUBEB

“When you talk about all these facilities, the government is trying but we have not yet gotten there. Right now the current governor is talking about model schools, so most of these facilities you are talking about, you will find them more in model schools. You will hardly find a school here with a sick bay, but there is first-aid box.”

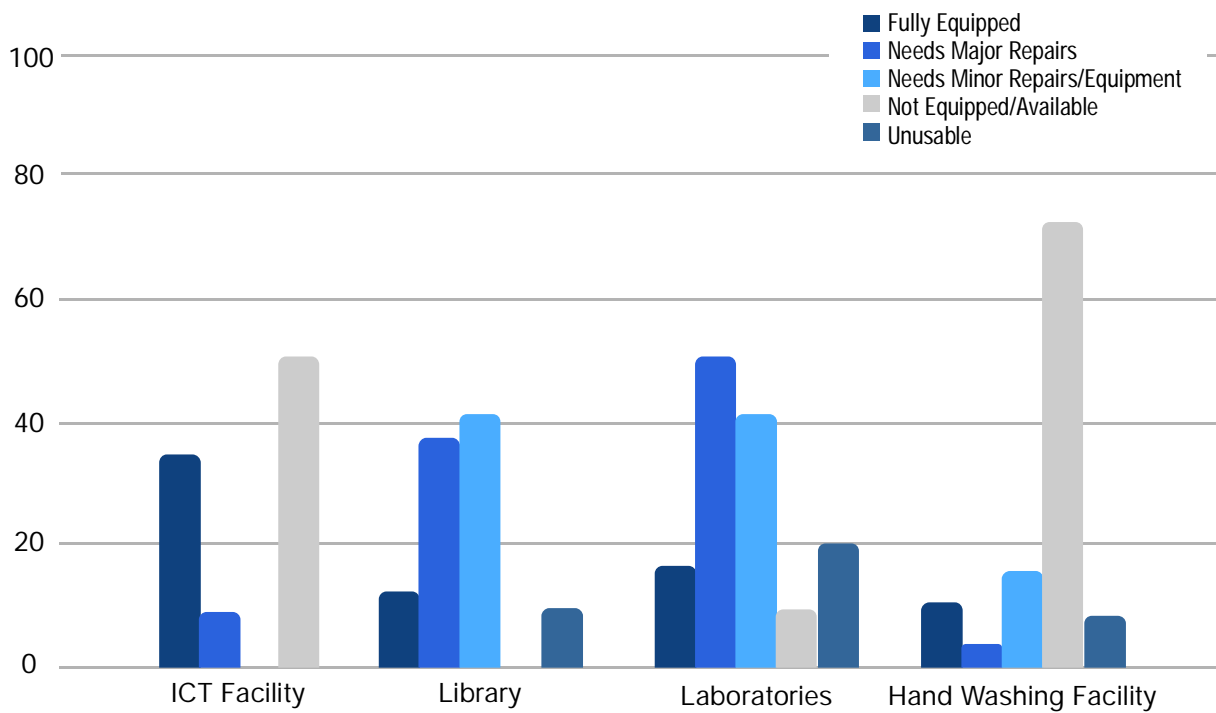
Civil Servant, SUBEB

“That has to do with finance. I went for inspection today where the government has built a primary school, and the whole room on a particular block has been cut off by thieves. That's a provision made by the government that turned out to be abused. SUBEB, Akwa Ibom State government, sincerely has done enough investment in the school. These are the people who are also going round to steal. Those doing these things are enemies of progress. But the government has done enough. We have provided what is needed in schools. Right now, Akwa Ibom SUBEB is about to move into the next supplies of items to schools for 2023. There is no year that this is not done. Why I said that is about finance is that the government has already set out a certain amount of money for education and the one that comes to SUBEB, we are using it to the last Kobo. If I were to take you out on a tour, I would be pointing these to you. We supply computers; we have e-learning centres, even at a point schools were provided with a lawn mower to cut grasses.”

Civil Servant, SUBEB



Fig. 23: Quality of School Facilities (1)



Asides from classrooms, other rooms available in schools were staff quarters, assembly hall, store, general office, dining room, security post, engine room, practical rooms, Corp members lodge, bookshop, and dormitories for boarding schools. Almost all (92%) the schools had an open field used as a play facility. The most common (88%) play facility across the school is the football field, followed by volleyball (24%) and basketball (24%) court.

Fig. 24: Quality of School Facilities (2)

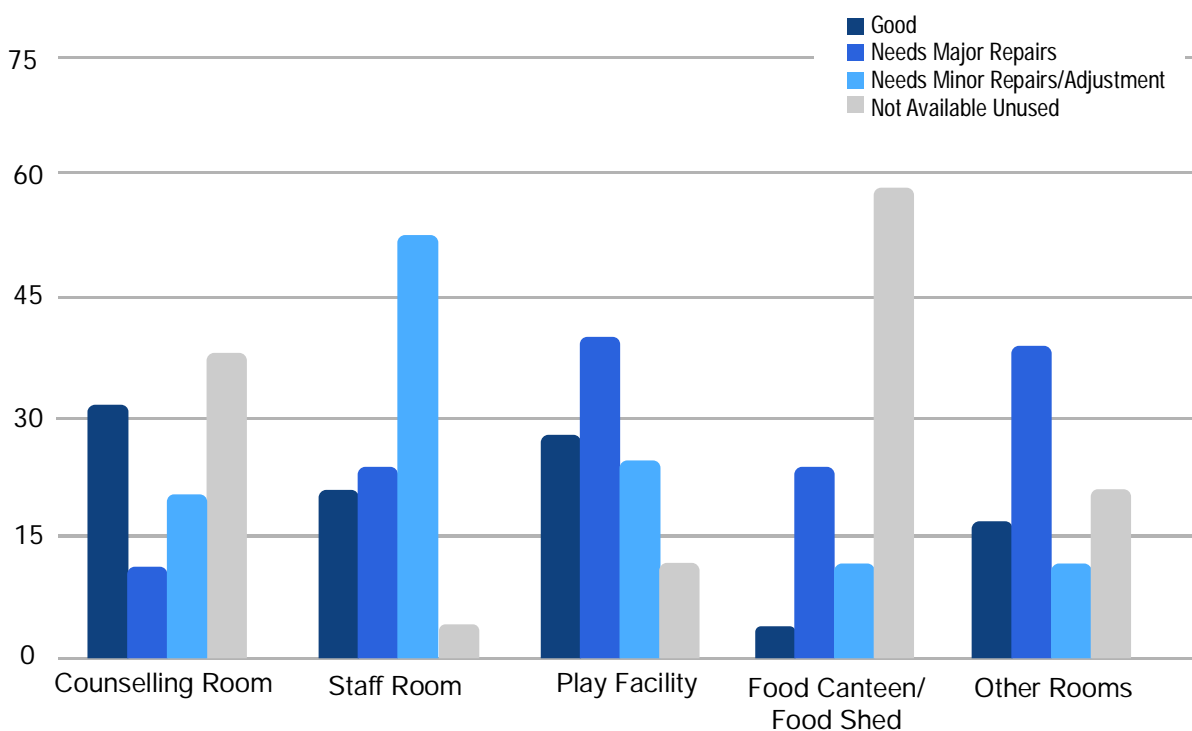


Fig. 25: Availability of Writing Materials and School Records

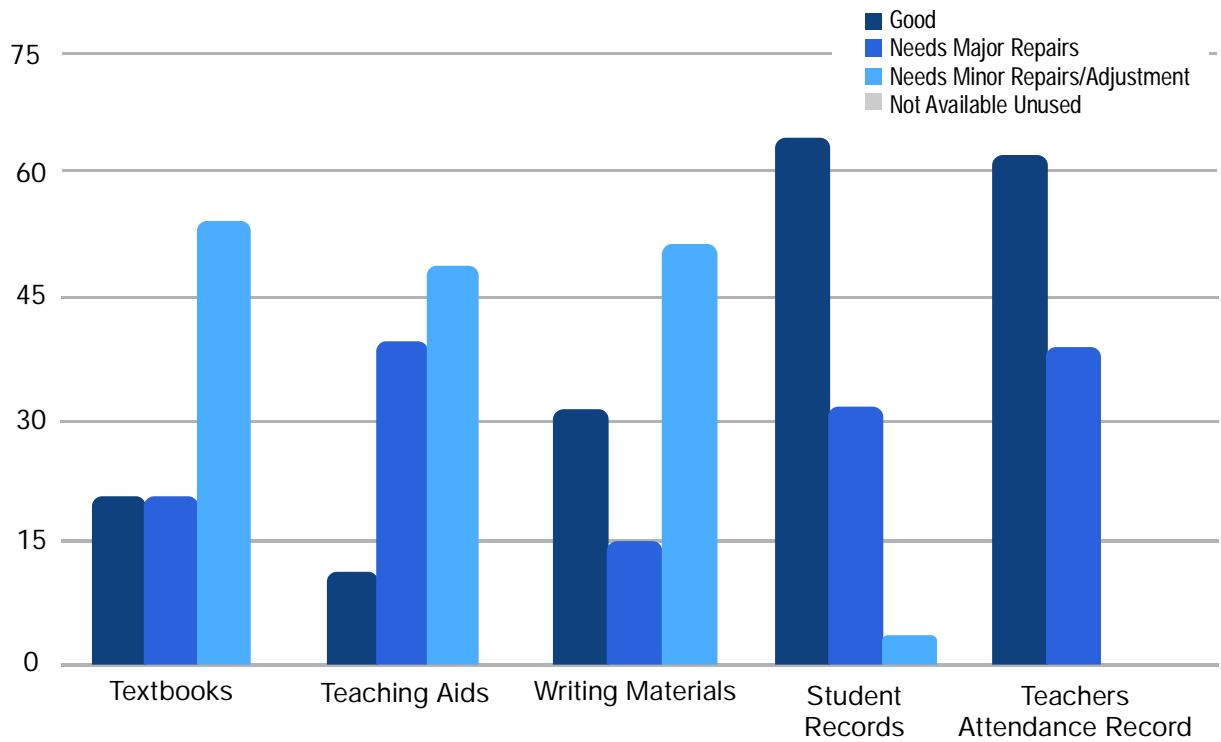


Fig. 26: Source of Power Available in the School

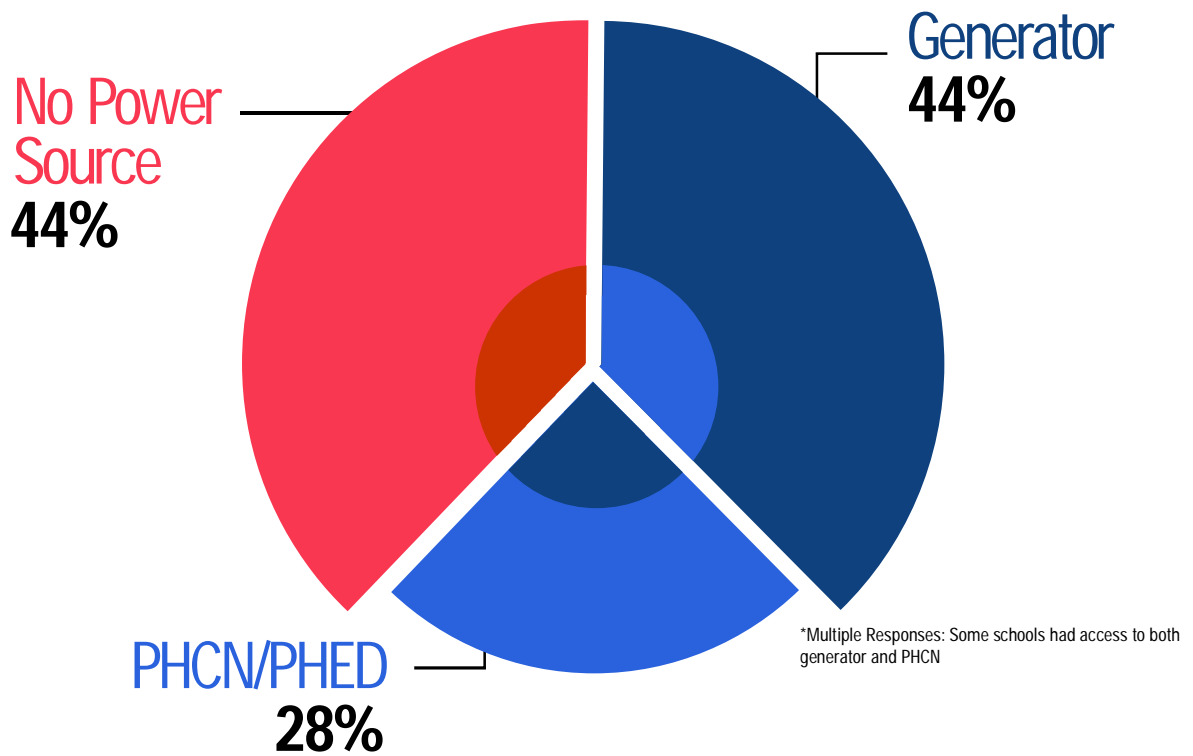


Table 11 presents the average number of pupils in a class with a mean of 53.12 + 20.43 students per class. The lowest number per class was 25 while the highest stood at 100. With 72% of the schools having more than 40 students per class, the sitting arrangement and number of students per class needs to be addressed.

Average No. of Students Per Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
25	2	8
30	2	8
40	3	12
45	2	8
50	9	36
58	1	4
60	1	4
80	3	12
100	2	8

Mean = 53.12 + 20.43

Table 12: Average Class Size

Gender Sensitive Facilities

The availability and sustainability of good toilets was recognised as gender sensitive. Participants acknowledge the efforts made by school authorities in some instances, particularly in constructing separate toilets for girls to ensure their comfort and privacy during menstruation. Some of the participants interviewed reported the presence of functional toilets in the school, however, there are notable concerns raised about the quality and adequacy of existing facilities. Some participants noted deficiencies in sanitary arrangements, with some toilets locked and unavailable for use. Additionally, there were mentions of existing toilet facilities, albeit with issues such as inadequate maintenance, water supply, and the absence of menstrual hygiene kits. Some participants mention that girls have to use pit toilets which is not a proper infrastructure to meet the hygiene needs of female students, particularly during their menstrual cycles.

Suggestions for improvements are also offered, with participants advocating for the provision of essential amenities such as water, sanitary pads, and other menstrual hygiene management facilities in school toilets. These suggestions aim to better support the specific needs of female students and ensure their health and dignity while at school. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the importance of gender-sensitive sanitary infrastructures, with participants highlighting the need for privacy and amenities like mirrors and bins for menstrual hygiene

products as well as constant supply of water. Concerns were also raised regarding the overall infrastructure of the school, including security issues that are more relevant to girls.

““ *In terms of infrastructure, already we have toilet facilities in the school where water closets are used and tissue paper is equally used but unfortunately in terms of the female students, I feel that sanitary pads should be provided to assist them.* _____ ””
Teaching Staff, Etim Ekpo LGA

““ *Just a latrine that just anybody can use, that a male can just stand and empty themselves and go their way. This does not apply to the female gender which is not, it has to be worked on. Not just toilet alone cause if I say, but toilet is a major problem.* _____ ””
After School Teacher, Eket LGA

““ *To be honest with you, when we talk about infrastructure in the school here, talk about the toilet here for instance, there are no toilets for the girls. The is one that has been built by the government but since it was built, it has not been used. That place is locked up, I don't know the reason. The infrastructure here is not okay.* _____ ””
Civil Servant, Ikot Ekpene LGA

““ *I have to be very frank. Students in public schools, tell me how, like in this school, that lab is not equipped. Is it the responsibility of the teacher? It is the government that is supposed to do that. But when it comes to public schools, they will just ignore it. And expecting a student from this school to become a good medical doctor, a good nurse or whatever, an engineer, whereas they have qualified teachers, science teachers, but the lab, they cannot. How can you be teaching things that need practical, verbally? If a child sees it, he will run away. Have you seen the difference? So, the government should be real if at all they are willing to work. Let them give, in short let them equip labs in public schools. That is my own.* _____ ””
Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

School Buildings

In order to understand the processes entailed in the building of schools, stakeholders involved in school constructions and those making use of the building were engaged. The responses provided valuable insights into the planning, construction, and maintenance of school infrastructure, with a particular focus on ensuring safety, functionality, and suitability for the educational needs of students, especially girls. One aspect highlighted was the importance of standardization in school infrastructure, suggesting that a typical school should comprise four classrooms per block, each block equipped with offices and adjacent toilets. Additionally, the inclusion of a sick bay in model schools and the presence of computer halls powered by solar panels were noted as essential features in modern educational facilities. Participants also emphasised the importance of various amenities such as laboratories, boarding

accommodations, and good roads to access schools. Concerns were raised about security, with calls for proper fencing to prevent unauthorized access. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for sufficient space and ventilation, particularly for female students, suggesting the construction of multi-story buildings to alleviate congestion and provide a comfortable learning environment.

Another critical consideration was emergency preparedness and environmental factors in school construction. Key features such as muster points for emergencies, alternative exits, adequate ventilation, and outdoor spaces for activities were emphasized. The need to incorporate environmental elements like air-loving trees and agricultural gardens to enrich the learning environment was also highlighted. During the planning stage of a school building, respondents reported that several considerations are involved such as communication between different parts of the school, accommodation arrangements, sanitation facilities, and security measures were discussed. The strategic placement of essential amenities like the kitchen, dining hall, and chapel was deemed vital to ensure efficient operations and create a conducive learning environment. The physical layout of classrooms was identified to be influential in student behaviour and attention, advocating for proper planning to minimize distractions and create a conducive atmosphere for learning. Also, close attention is needed to avoid design flaws that could lead to discomfort and accidents in the school environment. Proper material selection, structural design, and capacity planning were identified as crucial to mitigate risks such as structural failure or deterioration. The risks of blindly replicating models without considering contextual factors were also discussed, emphasizing the importance of thorough implementation and monitoring processes to maintain safety and quality standards. According to our respondents, schools are built by expert government officials, nonetheless, individual experts and consultants were of the view that collaboration between government agencies and professional bodies in school construction projects is essential. The involvement of technical experts to ensure infrastructure meets industry standards and addresses specific educational needs was advocated.

““ *The government is building a model school there and you will see what we are doing there. And I want you to know also that the government has taken over so many schools to follow this standard. Because every school must have classrooms with fans, but the problem is that people vandalise these things. We provide good toilets (WCs) and boreholes to ensure that the place is kept clean. So, you can see what the government is trying to do to market education palatable for everybody to access. This serenity can attract a girl child to be in school.* ””

Civil Servant, SUBEB

““ *We have our technical team in SUBEB, We have Civil Engineers, Quantity Surveyors etc. We don't consult outside. The Ministry of Works also comes in once a while. We are in partnership with the Nigeria Society of Engineers, they go around checking what we are doing to ensure that it is correct.* ””

Civil Servant, SUBEB

“ Ordinarily it is supposed to be so, for example, You hear government build government technical college by right they are supposed to say Professional bodies, who are technically inclined, please what and what is required? what should we do, and where should this one be placed? And they will create a synergy. Because especially vocational school, this technical school, you need idea from the people in the field from practicing people. Because if I am to give advice on how to bring out a model for a vocational or technical school, I will give a better advise based on my experience, for example, in terms of introductory technology in terms of their lab what is required in the lab and which one comes first. if I am to do electrical, what are the things I should see first from the first it is the primary thing I should know about electrical about circuit. For proper coordination, a technical person should be involved. So, I said the government should involve and collaborate with professional bodies when they want to. _____”

Male, Engineer

While classrooms, hostels, and other school buildings have designated capacity at the building stage, several responses were recorded from the school users and during observation. The school capacity influences facilities like toilets, security, hostel size, sport and library capacity. The responses regarding class size varied, with some participants citing government guidelines of 50 students per class, while others mentioned lower numbers such as 30 or even 25. However, several participants noted that in reality, class sizes often exceeded these ideal figures, with some classes having as many as 80 or even 100 students. Despite these large numbers, teachers emphasized the importance of effective management and control of the class environment. Additionally, some participants highlighted instances where class sizes were smaller, around 30 students, which they considered more conducive to effective teaching and learning.

“ I don't know if you people went around the classes. The way a girl child is very different. The way God created the male from the female. The male can sweat and can just move about freely without being irritated. But a female child will not be so. We take like 150 in a class, every where is jam-packed. No space for the girl child to get fresh air. As I was just looking, I said, I wish this school was made in story building form. We wouldn't have this kind of problem. So, I think the government should please give these schools more buildings, preferably story buildings. So, the girl child will be comfortable and learn in a very conducive environment. _____”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

School Maintenance

Responses affirmed the fact that the state government is responsible for the maintenance of school infrastructures and government officials described the processes involved in maintaining the schools in Akwa Ibom state. Participants also discussed the process of reporting maintenance needs to the government. It involves various steps, including reporting issues to the head teacher or principal, who then communicates them to the education secretary or local education committee. Ultimately, the reports are directed to the state government for action. This highlights the bureaucratic process involved in addressing maintenance issues and the need for efficient communication channels between schools and government bodies.

Some participants emphasised the responsibility of the government in providing and maintaining essential facilities, to ensure conducive learning environments. They criticised instances where government neglect led to inadequately equipped facilities, hindering students' practical learning experiences. Participants discussed the challenges faced, including vandalism and the need for regular inspections and repairs. Despite these challenges, efforts were made to ensure proper maintenance, with various committees and departments involved in monitoring and addressing issues. Additionally, community involvement was emphasised as crucial for the sustainability of school facilities. Committees were formed at the local level to oversee maintenance activities and encourage community contributions. Training programs were also conducted to equip individuals with the skills needed for minor maintenance tasks, further emphasising the collaborative effort required to ensure effective maintenance. Below are some of the responses;

“ We do that a lot as a board, we go around every year, we have what we call the work plan and we try to maintain according to the finances we have, because we have a lot of schools. We are in charge of both primary schools and junior secondary schools. The primary schools alone in this state is about 1,037 or so, when you add that to junior secondary school you know the number. We also have an issue apart from maintenance, vandalism is getting very high in the state, people are going to destroy what the government has already put in place, but we are doing our best, there is no way we don't do maintenance.”

Civil Servant, SUBEB

Security

Participants expressed the need for enhanced security measures both within and around school premises. This includes calls for more security personnel to be employed and stationed in schools to ensure the safety of students. Specific suggestions included the installation of gates and fences to protect school grounds and prevent unauthorized access. One prevalent issue raised by participants was the need for increased security personnel and measures within school premises. This includes calls for more security guards or officers to be stationed at schools to deter potential threats and ensure the safety of students and staff. In addition to

general security concerns, specific vulnerabilities within school infrastructure were identified. Participants mentioned instances of fallen fences and poorly constructed buildings, which could pose risks to student safety. Suggestions were made to address these vulnerabilities through repairs and maintenance to ensure that school facilities are secure and conducive to learning.

Furthermore, there is a significant focus on addressing security challenges beyond the physical infrastructure of schools. Participants emphasized the importance of comprehensive security strategies that extend to the surrounding community and the routes students take to and from school. Concerns were raised about the safety of female students, particularly regarding the risk of harassment or abuse during their commute. This highlights the need for collaborative efforts involving schools, families, and local authorities to implement measures that protect students both inside and outside the school environment.

“ Security. We have no fence outside of the fence. And also, in the evening, where students are supposed to come back for extra class. We cannot come because of where the school is being situated. And we cannot come to continue with that aspect. Because of the security, no security.”

Teaching Staff, Okobo LGA

“ Apart from all those things mentioned, I think from experience, the security of a girl child. Between the home and the school so many things happen that the parents may never know. A lot of girls are afraid of getting abused. I've handled cases, there's one I felt so bad. The mother came to me and told me she found contraceptives in her daughter's room where she keeps her things. She shares the room with her junior sister and she's worried and she asked the daughter and the daughter couldn't just explain. What are you using ontraceptives for? Are you already sleeping with men? At the end of the day, when I got to the bottom of the whole thing, she made one statement, she said, "mummy I don't want to get pregnant ". That means you're sleeping with men? She's still a virgin though. The truth of the matter is girls around her are being raped and it's increasing. So, she's taking the contraceptive peradventure she gets raped so that she won't get pregnant. So that fear of going to school alone. So, I think providing security for a girl child. And in providing that security, it has to involve the home, the school and the community. At home there is a security the home provides, as a child leaves the home the community's eyes are on the child. In the school, the teachers are also on the watchout, up to the very gate man at the gate. Everybody should be involved.”

Pastor, Uyo LGA

Perception Towards Teachers' Motivation

There is a recognition of the role teachers play in providing guidance and support beyond academic instruction for female students. Some teachers, particularly female ones, take it upon themselves to mentor and counsel female students, drawing from personal experiences to impart valuable life lessons and promote self-reliance. The perceptions toward motivating teachers vary significantly among respondents, with some advocating for financial incentives to enhance teacher morale and performance, while others emphasised alternative forms of encouragement and support. While some teachers acknowledged the efforts of the government as regards the payment of salaries as and when due, others pointed out the need for other forms of motivation. Additionally, there are discussions on the broader societal and governmental responsibilities in supporting teachers, particularly those working in remote or underprivileged areas. Financial incentives were seen as crucial for retaining and motivating teachers; there is also an acknowledgment of the need for systemic improvements, such as timely salary payments and infrastructure development, to enhance the teaching environment. While financial incentives are viewed positively by some, others caution against overreliance on monetary rewards and emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation and professional fulfillment.

“ *It's very important because, like for this village, very important for the government to at least add additional salary like motivation financially to those people who decided to work in the villages. Like this village, there is nothing; no water, no light and the transport from where they live to this place so they need is actually for the government to at least add small things for those teachers to encourage them to deliver.* ”

Trader, Okobo LGA

“ *There should be no financial lobbying by parents at all, but the government should improve their salaries and make it interesting for people to want to become teachers.* ”

Teacher, Uruan LGA

Teachers Salary

As regards teachers salary, the stakeholders' responses highlighted various perspectives on the challenges faced by teachers and potential solutions to improve their working conditions and motivation. One prevalent suggestion is the need for salary increments to address the financial strain experienced by teachers. Respondents stressed that current salary scales are inadequate and fail to meet the basic needs of educators. Additionally, there were calls for special salary structures tailored to recognize teaching as a professional occupation, akin to other professions such as medicine or law. Incentives were also proposed as a means to boost teacher morale and motivation. These incentives could include financial rewards, such as rural allowances or subject teacher allowances, to recognise the additional challenges faced by teachers working in remote areas or specialised subjects. Furthermore, the timely payment of

entitlements, such as leave grants and pensions, is highlighted as essential for maintaining teacher satisfaction and well-being. Beyond financial considerations, there is a recognition of the importance of career advancement opportunities for teachers. Promotion systems should be transparent and merit-based, providing a pathway for professional growth and recognition of contributions to the education sector.

“*The very important motivation is salary increment. Currently, there is no teacher that can comfortably say his salary is enough to pay for transport for even a week or two. Not to talk about feeding. And that also kills the morale of a teacher. So, a teacher's special salary scale should be set up as a professional. Doctors, lawyers, they are paid as professionals. The teacher's salary scale is too small. We are talking about paying a teacher as a maid. Training and retraining should also come in. But the major thing is money.*”

Teaching Staff, Uruan LGA

“*Teachers are paid though the salary is not in commensurate with their contribution. We are not yet there (laughs) but at least we have a package that can take us home and can extend us till next month. We are saying that it should be improved. For instance, we have been requesting for rural allowances to be paid to teachers, we are also soliciting for an increase in the subject teacher allowance and other allowances that can be given to encourage teachers. If all these allowances are increased and paid, there is no way subject teachers will not be encouraged.*”

Civil Servant, NUT

Teachers Assessment

Teachers are evaluated through various methods, including classroom observation, supervision by department heads, and monitoring of student performance. Department heads mark teachers' notes and observe their teaching methods to ensure that students are effectively learning and achieving positive results. Student assessments involve tests, assignments, and exams, with performance determining promotion or the need for remedial measures. Government bodies, such as the Ministry of Education and SUBEB, are responsible for assessing teachers through supervision and inspection visits to schools. These visits ensure teachers are at their duty posts and delivering quality education in line with government standards. Additionally, training programs for teachers involve supervision to ensure both teachers and students are actively participating and meeting attendance requirements. School inspection is also a routine process that involves the assessment of teachers, it helps verify that teachers fulfill their assigned duties adequately. Teachers who fail to meet expectations may face consequences, such as queries or punishment. The inspection process aims to maintain high educational standards by identifying areas for improvement and ensuring adherence to established guidelines.

Teachers Training

The respondents shared their experiences regarding training and preparation for teaching roles. Some mentioned a lack of specific training or professional development related to teaching. They stated that their preparation mainly stemmed from their educational background, without additional specialised training in teaching methodologies or educational support, except for occasional workshops or orientations. On the other hand, others mentioned attending workshops, orientations, or specialised training sessions related to teaching practices. These sessions aimed to fill gaps in knowledge and enhance teaching effectiveness, covering various topics such as classroom management and subject-specific training. Some teaching staff with tertiary education but have not received specialised teachers training, Corpers especially, indicated a major gap they look to fill so that they can be more effective at their job. This implies that there is a need for a structured routine training for teachers to ensure everyone of them is reached with necessary skills and professional development opportunities. Specific training on girl child education and management of female students was not reported by the teachers. This calls for the need for gender-sensitivity in the teachers training curriculum.

““ *The State Secondary Education Board does that, every term the public school teachers are exposed to training before resumption. And recently we had one at four towns, I think about three weeks ago, so from time to time the government and NGOs do that and the school itself, and we at the Local Education Committee we are not left out, we organise seminars free of charge for our schools... I wouldn't say from Ministry of Education because of recent I have not heard my non-teaching staff go for training at the ministry, but my non-teaching staff have gone for training at the ICT Unit of the state government, the ICT is under accountant general, they have trained my staff on computer and many other aspect of office management.* ””

Civil Servant, Zonal Director of Education

““ *We embark on it from a different perspective, the one we train the teachers nationwide once in a year, the one that each state negotiates with the institute to come and train their teachers. We also have Science and Mathematics Oriented teachers that we train which we usually train in the state. So, we have different packages that we offer the society to improve the education sector in the system... The last time of training depends on the state, the state can negotiate with the Institute, and they come and train their teachers for you. For Uyo last year we had the teachers retraining. We always have it yearly for primary and secondary school teachers. It is SUBEB that will select the serving teachers in government schools for us to train. This year we will still have it before the year runs out as approved by the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with the institute.* ””

Civil Servant, NTI

“ There are no teaching methods focused on the girl child only. You know in the conventional school the curriculum is the same whether it is girl school or mixed school, the course content is the same. But apart from that, the girl child guidance and encouragement is a general advocacy for all of us, we know how important they are. ”

Civil Servant, NTI

Teaching Resources

The responses from various participants offer insights into the availability and utilisation of instructional tools in educational settings. While some participants expressed doubts or lack of access to specialised teaching materials, others highlighted the use of computers or other devices for research and teaching preparation. There was a consensus among participants regarding the importance of adequate resources for effective teaching, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of students. Several participants mentioned the need for gender-specific resources and support for female students, emphasising the importance of promoting equal opportunities in education. Concerns were raised about overcrowded classrooms and insufficient resources, which may hinder effective teaching and learning. Suggestions for improvement include the adoption of innovative teaching methodologies and increased government support for both students and teachers. Some participants stressed the importance of providing additional resources and training to address the diverse learning needs of students, particularly in overcrowded or under-resourced schools.

“ We do not have adequate resources, in fact you find out that some school don't have teaching aid or instructional materials if you want to put it professionally and quite unfortunately what is happening in the system now especially at the secondary school level is that some of the teachers that we have now are not well groomed on how to improvise some of this materials. That is why we are emphasizing that those who teach our students should be trained teachers and not those that passed through from secondary school to teachers training college to college of education. Some of us that are well groomed had the opportunity of learning all these things, we could devise and improvise any material to teach the children any subject that we want at any time. But anybody who is not so exposed might be deficient. When children listen, see and feel what you are teaching, it makes learning better. ”

Civil Servant, NUT

Roles of Educational Stakeholders in Girl Child Education

Stakeholders play crucial roles in enhancing educational opportunities for girls, as reflected in various responses from different sources. Various stakeholders have been actively involved in advancing girl child education and welfare. Teachers recounted their achievements in the classroom, highlighting academic successes and the enforcement of discipline to foster conducive learning environments. Additionally, the stakeholders mentioned conducting evaluations to ensure compliance with educational standards set by the federal ministry. Advocacy and intervention efforts were discussed, including initiatives such as women's committees, community awareness campaigns, and interventions to bridge gender gaps in education enrollment and support. Beyond their regular duties, some of the stakeholders engaged go an extra mile to promote the welfare of girls in school. One stakeholder, speaking on behalf of the Nigerian Society of Engineers, highlighted their commitment to supporting girl-child. Through their Female Engineers Association, they distribute sanitary pads to girls' schools and conduct career counselling sessions, equipping young girls with knowledge about engineering fields and educational pathways. Additionally, they provide guidance on university and career options, ensuring girls are well-informed about opportunities in STEM fields.

The representative from the State Universal

Basic Education Board (SUBEB) highlighted the pivotal role their office plays in overseeing junior secondary schools. They emphasised the importance of training sessions they organise for teachers, particularly focusing on addressing the needs of girl children. During these training sessions, female teachers are encouraged to pay close attention to the well-being of girl students, considering their vulnerability to various challenges. The aim is not only to impart academic knowledge but also to provide support and guidance to ensure the holistic development and safety of girl children within the educational system. The Zonal Director of Education outlined their responsibilities, stating that their role encompasses various tasks aimed at enhancing the quality of education within their zone. They mentioned conducting regular monitoring visits to schools to ensure compliance with educational standards and guidelines. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of providing support and guidance to school administrators and teachers, particularly in implementing effective teaching methods and curriculum delivery. The director emphasised the significance of fostering a conducive learning environment conducive to the academic and personal development of students. Furthermore, they expressed a commitment to addressing any challenges or issues that may arise within the educational system, with a focus on

promoting equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender or background. challenges. The aim is not only to impart academic knowledge but also to provide support and guidance to ensure the holistic development and safety of girl children within the educational system. The Zonal Director of Education outlined their responsibilities, stating that their role encompasses various tasks aimed at enhancing the quality of education within their zone. They mentioned conducting regular monitoring visits to schools to ensure compliance with educational standards and guidelines. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of providing support and guidance to school administrators and teachers, particularly in implementing effective teaching methods and curriculum delivery. The director emphasised the significance of fostering a conducive learning environment conducive to the academic and personal development of students. Furthermore, they expressed a commitment to addressing any challenges or issues that may arise within the educational system, with a focus on promoting equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender or background.

Government representatives, including officials from the Ministry of Education and education regulatory bodies, play a vital role in monitoring and evaluating educational programs. Through regular school visits and assessments, they ensure that schools adhere to educational standards and provide necessary resources for effective learning environments. Moreover, they implement policies to address challenges such as child trafficking and child labour, safeguarding the rights and well-being of girls in education. The NSCDC plays a crucial role in safeguarding children's rights and promoting education. According to their spokesperson, they

engage in sensitisation, surveillance, and monitoring activities to combat trafficking, a significant concern in the past. Additionally, they actively raise community awareness about the accessibility of public schooling, encouraging parents to enrol their children. By deploying monitoring teams, they effectively enforce school attendance, reducing instances of children engaging in street hawking during school hours. These efforts reflect the NSCDC's commitment to creating a secure environment conducive to children's education and well-being.

The National Teachers' Institute plays a significant role in enhancing girl child education in Akwa Ibom State by providing training and resources to teachers. With focus on the sustainable development goals, the Institute trains primary and junior secondary school teachers, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to positively impact students. They offer postgraduate diploma programs in education to graduates from various fields, ensuring they become professional teachers capable of employing child-centered approaches in their teaching methods. Additionally, the Institute actively supports girl child education by providing financial assistance and other forms of support in local communities and churches. Furthermore, the Institute attracts learners through its comprehensive training programs, which have been ongoing since its establishment in 1976. Accredited and supervised by regulatory bodies, their programs range from NCE to degree programs, including postgraduate diploma courses in education. With highly qualified personnel and well-structured distance learning programs conducted on weekends, students can pursue education without interrupting their work or business. The Institute's extensive course materials and

affordable fees make it an attractive option for aspiring educators, and its commitment to uninterrupted learning is highlighted by the absence of strikes.

Meanwhile, community advocates focus on raising awareness and engaging with families to prioritize girl child education. By conducting household visits and community meetings, they address cultural barriers and promote the importance of girls' education. These advocates also facilitate access to educational resources and funding, ensuring

that girls have equal opportunities to pursue their academic aspirations. Together, these stakeholders collaborate to create a supportive ecosystem that empowers girls to access quality education and pursue their academic and professional goals. By combining advocacy, resource provision, and regulatory oversight, they work towards a future where every girl has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to society through education.



COST OF GIRL CHILD EDUCATION IN A TERM FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL IN AKWA IBOM STATE



*These are price estimates as at May, 2024. For a new school term, our estimate is that the girl child will spend about **₦62,000** on school essentials. We are also assuming the student has access to textbooks. In addition to this, we are assuming the parents do not have to make out of pocket payments asides those stated above.

Kpeb Enye Mfin Bak'
idi'due Usung

Teach him/her now so he will
not go astray later

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations and Implications for Policy Change

1. Creating a Nurturing and Inclusive Environment

Participants underscored the importance of nurturing a supportive and inclusive school environment where girls feel safe to seek guidance and share their concerns. Schools should implement programmes that promote peer support, mentorship, and counselling services to address the socio-emotional needs of students. Collaborative efforts between teachers, parents, and community leaders can enhance awareness and sensitivity towards gender issues, fostering an environment conducive to girls' academic success.

2. Enhanced Teacher Training and Support

Based on the data, there is a strong emphasis on the need for continuous professional development for teachers, particularly focusing on the unique challenges faced by the girl child. Training programs should include modules on gender sensitivity, understanding the specific needs of girls, and strategies to support their education effectively. Engaging professional educationists, as mentioned, can significantly improve teaching methodologies and educational outcomes.

3. Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Counselling Services

Incorporating comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula is essential to empower girls with knowledge and skills to make informed reproductive health decisions. Schools should allocate more resources and personnel to counselling services to provide adequate support for students' mental health and well-being. Government initiatives should prioritise the recruitment and training of counsellors to meet the diverse needs of students, fostering a supportive environment conducive to girls' educational success.

4. Community and Parental Engagement

There is a need to enhance community awareness regarding the importance of girl child education. Community sensitization programs should be intensified to address cultural and socio-economic barriers that hinder girls' education. Initiatives such as community awareness campaigns, parent-community partnerships can foster a supportive environment for girls' education sessions, and school-community.

5. Provision of Sanitation and Hygiene Facilities

Adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities are critical to keeping girls in school, especially during menstruation. Schools should be equipped with gender-segregated toilets and access to sanitary products. Hygiene promotion programs, including the formation of health clubs and observance of important health days, should be implemented to educate students about hygiene practices. Installing toilets and water facilities closer to

classrooms will promote hygiene and convenience, reducing absenteeism among girls.

6. Financial Support and Incentives

Financial barriers remain a significant impediment to girl child education. Scholarships, stipends, soft loans and other financial incentives should be provided to support girls from low-income families. Policies should ensure that education is genuinely free and accessible, and efforts should be made to alleviate indirect costs of schooling such as uniforms, books, and transportation.

7. Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Safety Concerns

Ensuring the safety of girls in and around schools is paramount. Measures should be taken to prevent gender-based violence, including the establishment of female security squads and enforcement of strict anti-trafficking laws. Safe transportation options and secure school environments can help reduce dropout rates and improve attendance.

8. Promotion of STEM Education for Girls

Specific programs aimed at promoting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education among girls should be introduced. Career counselling and mentorship programs can help girls explore opportunities in traditionally male-dominated fields, thus broadening their career prospects and aspirations.

9. Combating Trafficking and Supporting Vulnerable Girls

Efforts to combat trafficking and support at-risk girls must be prioritised to safeguard their right to education. Government initiatives should include robust measures to prevent trafficking, provide rehabilitation and support services for victims, and enforce strict laws against perpetrators. Schools should implement awareness programmes and safety protocols to protect vulnerable students. Community engagement and partnerships with NGOs are essential for creating a protective network around girls and ensuring their uninterrupted access to education.

10. Addressing Teacher Shortages and School Support

To improve girl child education, addressing teacher shortages and fostering supportive school environments are critical. The government should prioritise teacher recruitment, training, and retention programmes, particularly focusing on enhancing teaching quality and gender-sensitive pedagogy. Schools need adequate resources such as counselling services, scholarships, and upgraded facilities to create conducive learning environments that promote academic excellence and holistic development.

11. Transportation Support

Initiatives to provide safe and accessible transportation options should be developed, including ferry boats and motorcycles, which can ease commute challenges faced by girls in rural areas, ensuring they attend school regularly without hindrance from long distances or unsafe conditions.

Policy Implications

1. Integrated Education Policies

The government should adopt an integrated approach to education policy, ensuring that gender considerations are mainstreamed into all educational planning and implementation processes. Policies should be designed to address the multifaceted barriers to girl child education, incorporating health, safety, financial, and socio-cultural aspects.

2. Inter-Ministerial Collaboration

Effective collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women Affairs, and other relevant bodies is essential to create a holistic support system for girl child education. Joint initiatives and programs can address the overlapping issues of health, safety, and education more effectively.

3. Enhanced Budget Allocation

Adequate funding is crucial for the implementation of targeted programs and initiatives aimed at improving girl child education. The government should increase budget allocations for education, with specific earmarks for programs supporting girls. Additionally, partnerships with international donors and NGOs can supplement government efforts and resources.

4. Legal and Regulatory Framework

Strengthening the legal and regulatory framework to enforce compulsory education and prohibit child labour and early marriage is critical. Policies should ensure strict compliance with education laws, and punitive measures should be in place for violations. Legal provisions should also protect girls from gender-based violence and discrimination in schools.

5. Research

Continuous research and data collection are necessary to monitor progress and identify emerging challenges in girl child education. Establishing a robust data collection system will enable policymakers to make informed decisions based on empirical evidence. Periodic surveys and studies can provide insights into the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs.

6. Community-Based Interventions

Continuous research and data collection are necessary to monitor progress and identify emerging challenges in girl child education. Establishing a robust data collection system will enable policymakers to make informed decisions based on empirical evidence. Periodic surveys and studies can provide insights into the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs.

7. Incentivising Private Sector Participation

Encouraging private sector involvement through public-private partnerships can bring additional resources and innovations into the education sector. Policies should provide incentives for private organisations to support girl child education through scholarships, infrastructure development, and capacity-building programs. By implementing these recommendations and policy implications, the state of girl child education in Akwa Ibom State can be significantly improved, ensuring that every girl has the opportunity to access quality education and reach her full potential.

Conclusion

This report has described the myriad antecedent factors impacting girl child education in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, and inadequate educational infrastructure significantly hinder the educational attainment of girls. Despite governmental and organisational efforts to promote gender parity in education, these efforts are often hampered by deep-rooted societal attitudes and resource constraints. In light of these findings, it is imperative to adopt a multi-faceted approach to address the barriers to girl child education in Akwa Ibom State. This involves not only enhancing the quality and accessibility of education through improved infrastructure and teacher training but also addressing socio-cultural attitudes that devalue female education. Community engagement and awareness campaigns are crucial in shifting perceptions and encouraging families to prioritise education for their daughters. Furthermore, targeted interventions, such as scholarships and mentorship programmes, can provide the necessary support for girls to succeed academically. By tackling these antecedent factors comprehensively, it is possible to create a more equitable educational landscape that empowers and uplifts the girl child in Akwa Ibom State.

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ABOUT ONELIFE INITIATIVE

Onelife Initiative is a youth-serving non-governmental organisation actively providing and connecting young people with information, services and resources needed to thrive and build a resilient society. We prioritise policy advocacy and promote gender and social inclusion across our thematic areas.

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