

Enhancing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom, Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone

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Abstract: In Sierra Leone, the enrollment of girls in schools has always been lower than that of their male counterparts. Girl-child education has therefore become a more sensitive social concern and the Forum for Africa Women Educationalists (FAWE) is one of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) helping the Government to increase the enrollment and retention of girls in schools. The study therefore investigates the potentials of FAWE in enhancing Girl-child education in Tikonko Chiefdom. The study was descriptive and made use of 40(80%) respondents as sample including 10 teachers, 10 administrators and 20 parents. Questionnaires were developed, pretested for validity and reliability and then used to collect data. Data analysis was done using frequencies and percentages. According to the findings, FAWE is providing formal education as well as vocational and technical skills training for girls in the study area. Apart from the provision of education, FAWE has the potential of enhancing girl-child education through the increase of enrollment of girls and raising of awareness about girl-child education. Teenage pregnancy, inadequate trained and qualified teachers and inadequate teaching and learning materials are among the problems encountered by FAWE. Community sensitization, provision of adequate teaching and learning materials and the employment of trained and qualified teachers are among the solutions to the problems encountered by FAWE in Tikonko. The main conclusions of the study were that FAWE has a great potential in enhancing Girl-Child Education with special focus on sensitizing the community about Girl-Child Education and reducing dropout rate of girls from formal school system. Meanwhile, it is recommended that FAWE, assisted by the Government should create opportunities for Primary and Senior Secondary Schools education, provide adequate teaching and learning materials and also employ trained and qualified teachers.

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Introduction

Educating girls and women has both personal and societal benefits. Educated women and girls have the potential to earn more and take care of their families. They are capable of lowering birth rate, reducing infant mortality and increasing the level of public health. They also possess the ability to participate in governance and democratic processes with families that readily learn and support development goals.

However, disparity continues to exist in the number of boys and girls found in schools in most of the sub-Saharan African countries (ADEA, 2020). According to UNICEF (2016), the number of school-aged girls enrolled, continues to decrease drastically from primary schools unto tertiary education institutions.

Statistics on the education of African women and girls in sub-Saharan African countries revealed that nineteen of these countries have a female literacy rate below 30 percent while corresponding rates for males double this percentage (UNICEF, 2006). Twenty-six countries in the region have not reached gender parity in access to primary education and less than fifty percent of girls between six and eleven years are estimated to be in school. The situation worsens at secondary and tertiary levels. In many African countries, only one in four girls has a chance of receiving a secondary education while at tertiary level, there are twice as many male students as female (UNICEF, 2006).

In Sierra Leone, the enrollment of girls in schools has always been lower than that of their male counterparts. After the eleven-year rebel war, the situation became a more sensitive social concern and the Government of Sierra Leone and some Non-Governmental Organizations embarked on strategies to enhance Girl-Child Education. Although the dropout rate of girls from schools in Sierra Leone in general and Tikonko chiefdom in particular has been alarming especially after the rebel war and the ebola epidemic, efforts have been made by stakeholders involved in girl-child education to increase enrollment and retention in schools. The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) which was established in Sierra Leone in 1992 and in Tikonko Chiefdom in 2003 is one of the Non-Governmental Organizations helping Government to promote Girl-Child Education.

FAWE is a pan-African non-governmental organization founded by five ministers of education. Their aim was to promote girls' and women's education in sub-Saharan Africa by making sure they have access to schools and are able to complete their studies and fulfill their potential in line with UNESCO'S Education For All movement. Members of the organization include ministers of education, university vice-chancellors, education policy-makers, researchers, gender specialists and human rights activists (fawe.org, 2019). Through the intervention of FAWE, most ministries of education in sub-Sahara African countries have adopted gender-responsive policies like free primary education, re-entry policies for adolescent mothers and scholarships for under-privileged girls and gender-responsive teacher training. Resultant improvements in enrolment, retention and performance of girls in school have been experienced in these countries (ADEA, 2020). Based on such improvement, it is believed that the establishment of a girls' school by FAWE in Tikonko town, may help improve girl-child education in the chiefdom. The research therefore investigates the potential of FAWE in enhancing girl-child education in Tikonko Chiefdom.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

- ✓ The purpose of the study is to find out the potentials of FAWE in enhancing Girl-child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.

The main objectives of the study include to:

- ✓ Identify the various educational opportunities provided by FAWE in Tikonko Chiefdom.
- ✓ Determine the potential of FAWE in enhancing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.
- ✓ Identify the problems encountered by FAWE in providing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.

- ✓ Proffer solutions to the problems faced by FAWE in enhancing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.

In identifying the various educational opportunities provided by FAWE, the Government of Sierra Leone and stake holders of the organization (FAWE) will be capable of taking informed decisions on improving the available educational opportunities or providing more to increase enrollment of girls. The determination of the potentials of FAWE towards enhancing Girl-Child Education will encourage donors to assist the organization financially or otherwise in achieving their goals i.e. increased enrollment and retention of girls in schools.

Identifying the problems encountered by FAWE will create awareness about the problems and spur stakeholders in finding solutions that will help to improve the school.

Soliciting the solutions to the problems which FAWE encounters will enable the beneficiaries to be part of the decision making process which is essential for providing their felt needs and ensuring sustainable development.

Methodology

Study Area

Tikonko is the head quarter town of Tikonko chiefdom which is one of the fifteen (15) chiefdoms in Bo District, Southern Sierra Leone. The chiefdom hosts one of the campuses of Njala University, two renowned private schools and six government assisted schools. The town itself comprises two and three government assisted Junior secondary and primary schools respectively. The dominant tribe in Tikonko town is the mende tribe; however, there are other tribes like the Limba, Fullah, Temne and Susu. The illiteracy rate is relatively high, hence the high level of dropout rate of girls (Amara, 2003).

Design of the Study

The study is a mixed design based on qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect primary data from self-completed questionnaires, interviews and discussion. The study made use of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to analyze the data and report the findings.

Research population and sample

The population of the study included all the Administrators, Teachers and Parents of the pupils attending the FAWE Junior Secondary School.

A total of 40 (80%) respondents were randomly selected as the sample of the study. This included 10 (25%) Administrators, 10 (25%) Teachers and 20 (50%) Parents.

Sampling procedure

All the teachers were selected for the study. However, the Administrators and the Parents were selected using simple random sampling techniques. The names of the twelve (12) Administrators were written on pieces of papers. These were folded neatly and placed into a bag. One name was drawn from the bag at a time, recorded and placed again in the bag. This continued until the ten (10) names were all selected. Again, the names of the pupils in J.S.S 1,2,3 and students at the vocational school were written on pieces of paper. The papers for each class were folded and placed in a bag. One name was drawn from the bag at a time and replaced in the bag until five names were selected for each class giving a total of 20 pupils for the four classes. The parents of these 20 pupils were used for the study.

Instrumentation

Questionnaires were developed based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaires were used to obtain relevant information for the study. The instruments were designed bearing in mind that they elicit the type and quality of data that were required; that is the researcher ensured that the questionnaires developed were valid and reliable. The questionnaires were pre-tested in schools in Bo City, outside Tikonko Chiefdom. After pre-testing, the responses to items in the instrument were analyzed and were found to be similar in interpretation by the subjects who responded to the items. This implies that the instrument was reliable. For effective distribution of questionnaires, the researcher trained data collectors to assist her administer the questionnaires.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using well-structured questionnaires. Some of the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents that were literate and the completed ones collected after a week. The illiterate respondents who were mostly parents were interviewed in their local language (mende) using the questionnaire and the responses recorded correctly. Follow-up discussions were also done with other stake-holders that were not part of the sample for confirmation of the answers got from the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) with frequencies and percentages presented in tables and figures.

Results and Discussion

The researcher concentrated on analyzing and discussing data on the following variables as prescribed in the objectives of the study:

- ✓ Identify the various educational opportunities provided by FAWE in Tikonko Chiefdom.
- ✓ Determine the potential of FAWE in enhancing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.
- ✓ Identify the problems encountered by FAWE in providing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.
- ✓ Proffer solutions to the problems faced by FAWE in enhancing Girl-Child Education in Tikonko Chiefdom.

A. Educational Opportunities Provided by FAWE in Tikonko

All the respondents (100%) were aware that FAWE provides nursery and junior secondary school education, adult literacy and numeracy, training in tailoring, weaving, food processing and storage as well as home management for learners in Tikonko chiefdom.

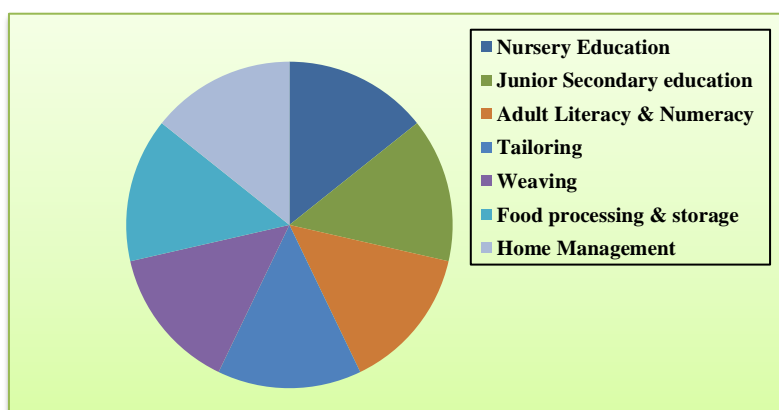


Figure 1. Percentages of Respondents on Educational Opportunities Currently Provided By FAWE

FAWE’s Potential in Enhancing Girl-Child Education

The data collected shows that all (100%) the respondents strongly agreed that FAWE is substantially contributing to the provision of formal education for girls and also helping to increase the enrollment of girls into formal school. Also, 34 (85%) and 29 (72.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that FAWE is helping girls to be economically productive and raising awareness about girl-child education. However, 60% of the respondents each partly agreed that FAWE is providing learning materials for girls and extending educational opportunities to other villages in Tikonko Chiefdom. Interestingly, 3(7.5%) and 4(10%) each do not know if FAWE is raising awareness or providing trained and qualified teachers for girl- child education.

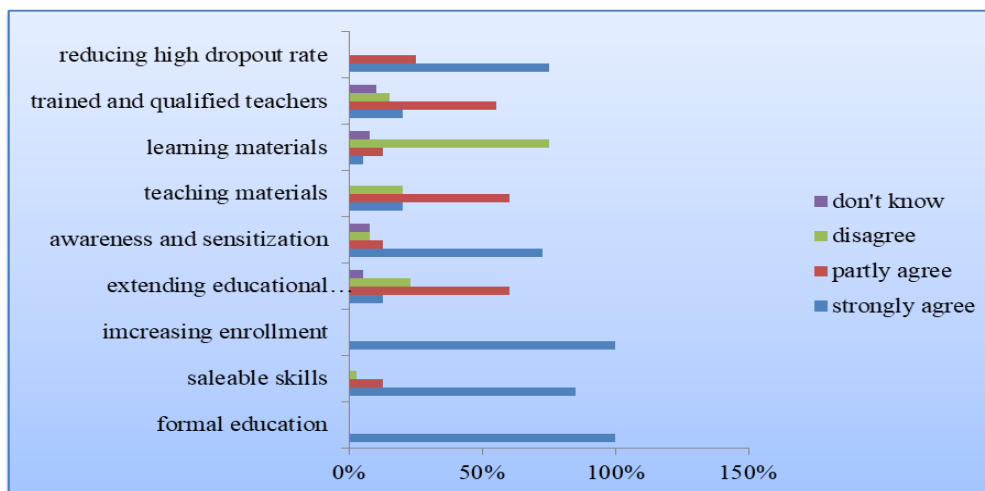


Figure 2. FAWE’s potential in enhancing Girl-Child Education.

Problems Encountered by FAWE

About 35 (87.5%) and 34 (85%), each of the respondents strongly agreed that inadequate funds and teenage pregnancy are part of the problems encountered by FAWE. Also, 30 (75%), and 29 (72.5%) showed that inadequate trained and qualified teachers, high dropout rate, early marriage and inadequate teaching and learning materials are among the problems encountered by FAWE in Tikonko. However, 25 (62.5%) each of the respondents disagreed that negative attitudes of parents towards Girl-Child Education and high illiteracy level among parents are the problems encountered by FAWE.

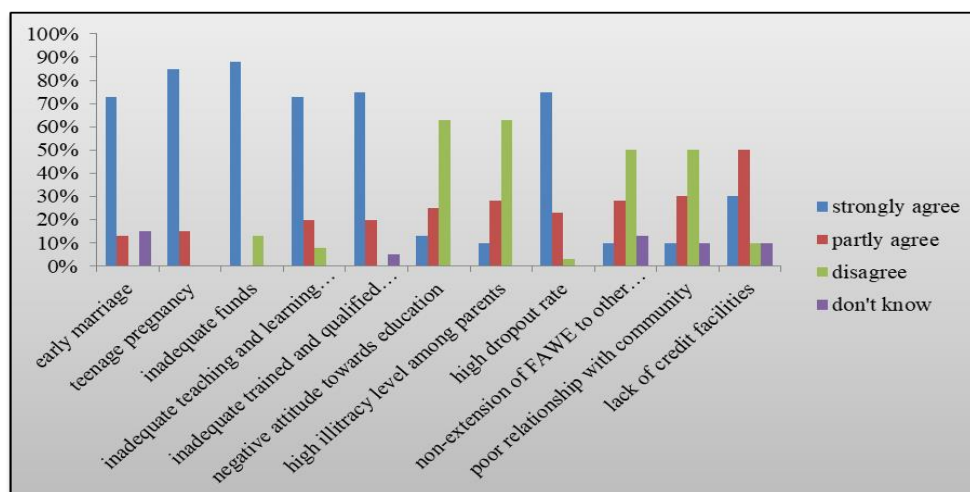


Figure 3. Problems encountered by FAWE

Solutions to the Problems Encountered by FAWE

The information in figure IV shows that all (100%) of the respondents agreed that the following are the solutions to the problems:

- ✓ Community sensitization
- ✓ Financial support from Government and Non-Governmental Organizations
- ✓ Provision of adequate teaching and learning materials
- ✓ Provision of credit facilities and
- ✓ Employment of trained and qualified teachers

Again, thirty-six (ninety percent) each of the respondents agreed that healthy FAWE-Community relationship and adult literacy programmes are solutions to the problems of FAWE in Tikonko. Also, 30(75%) of the respondents agreed that the provision of scholarship for girls are the solutions to the problems of FAWE.

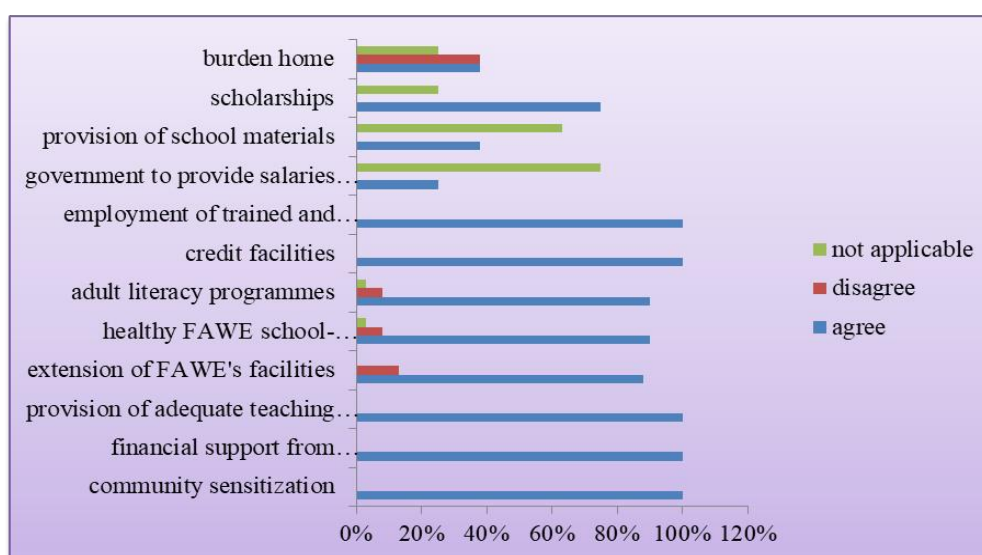


Figure 4. Frequencies of solutions to FAWE’s problems

Conclusion

It is concluded that formal education and vocational and technical skills training are the educational opportunities provided by FAWE in Tikonko chiefdom. Nursery Education, Junior secondary school education and adult literacy and numeracy are the formal type of education offered by FAWE while tailoring, weaving and home management are the vocational and technical skills training offered. It was further concluded that the major problems encountered by FAWE in enhancing Girl-child Education are:

- ✓ Early marriage and teenage pregnancy.
- ✓ High dropout rates.
- ✓ Inadequate availability of teaching and learning materials as well as trained and qualified teachers.
- ✓ Inadequate funds to run the school

The following are some of the recommended solutions:

- ✓ Community sensitization about the dangers of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.
- ✓ Provision of teaching and learning materials
- ✓ Provision of financial support and credit facilities
- ✓ Employment of trained and qualified teachers
- ✓ Provision of scholarship for girls

- ✓ Embarking on adult literacy programmes and
- ✓ Creating of healthy FAWE-Community relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

- ✓ FAWE, assisted by Government and Non-Governmental organizations should provide primary and senior secondary school education in the study area.
- ✓ FAWE should create opportunities for the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials.
- ✓ Government, other Non-governmental Organizations together with FAWE Should provide scholarship for the girls.
- ✓ The administrators of FAWE school- Tikonko should endeavor to employ trained and qualified teachers.
- ✓ FAWE should expand its vocational program to cater for more girls and women in the study area.

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