

Assessing the Impacts of Participatory Communication in Promoting Girl-Child Education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The research is conducted in two phases, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how participatory communication strategies influence access, retention, and academic success among girls in FCT. The first phase focuses on gathering qualitative insights through focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with educators, parents, policymakers, and students, capturing lived experiences and perceptions on communication-driven educational advocacy. The second phase employs a quantitative survey to assess the statistical significance of participatory communication initiatives on girl-child education, analysing variables such as enrollment rates, classroom participation, and community involvement. Findings indicate that community-driven dialogue, interactive media programmes, and inclusive decision-making significantly enhance awareness and reduce socio-cultural barriers that hinder female education. The study concludes that participatory communication serves as a crucial tool in fostering educational inclusivity, recommending policy frameworks that integrate grassroots communication strategies to enhance girl-child education in FCT Abuja. These findings contribute to existing literature by emphasising the

[#] Esosa Asielue EKAS, anipr, is a dedicated communications professional from Delta State, Nigeria. She holds a BSc in Mass Communication and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Development Communication at Nasarawa State University, Keffi. Driven by the persistent educational disparities faced by Nigerian girls, my research explores participatory communication on girl child education in FCT Abuja, aiming to inform policy and practice for a more equitable future.

role of communication in addressing educational disparities and advocating for sustainable interventions to bridge the gender gap in education.

Keywords: Participatory communication, girl-child education, community engagement, FCT, Abuja, educational advocacy.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right and a key driver of national development. In Nigeria, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, gender disparities in education persist, limiting opportunities for girls and their contributions to societal progress. Socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional barriers have significantly hindered girl-child education, despite ongoing governmental and non-governmental interventions (Ige et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches, such as participatory communication, which fosters inclusive dialogue, engagement, and collective decision-making to support educational initiatives (Bridget, 2015).

Participatory communication refers to a communication model that emphasises interaction, inclusivity, and local involvement in decision-making processes (Ughegbe, 2021). It moves away from the conventional top-down approach by enabling stakeholders, including educators, parents, policymakers, and students, to contribute actively to solutions. Girl-child education encompasses the formal and informal learning opportunities provided to female children, ensuring their access to quality education and skill development (Kevin, 2023). In this context, participatory communication serves as a strategic tool to bridge educational gaps and promote gender inclusivity in learning environments. The discourse on girl-child education has gained prominence from the early 1990s to the present due to increasing global efforts to achieve gender equality in education. Organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have consistently advocated

for policies that support girls' access to education (UNESCO, 2022; UNICEF, 2021).

In Nigeria, historical inequalities in female education have been linked to cultural biases, economic hardships, and inadequate policy implementation (Tsegysu, 2020). According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), over 10.5 million children are out of school in Nigeria, and 60% of them are girls, with the majority residing in northern regions where early marriage, poverty, and gender norms heavily restrict female education (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reported that as of 2021, the literacy rate for females aged 15–24 was 59.3%, compared to 70.9% for males, reflecting a persistent gender gap in educational attainment. Participatory communication emerged as a relevant approach in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly within the field of development communication, as a response to the limitations of top-down communication models.

Rooted in the work of scholars like Paulo Freire, it emphasises dialogue, inclusion, and grassroots involvement. In the context of girl-child education, participatory communication empowers communities to take ownership of advocacy and implementation efforts by encouraging local dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and culturally sensitive approaches to change. FCT Abuja, the city centre, benefits from well-funded schools and government interventions, while the surrounding rural and semi-urban settlements experience significant educational challenges. Many girls in these areas face obstacles such as early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and economic constraints that prevent them from accessing quality education (Servaes, 2008).

Traditional beliefs that prioritise male education over female education also contribute to the gender gap in schooling; over 70% of parents still favour educating boys over girls due to cultural and economic reasons (Action Aid Nigeria, 2021). Such beliefs significantly contribute to the persistent gender gap in education

despite growing advocacy for gender equality (UNICEF, 2022). Additionally, the influx of migrants into FCT Abuja from other parts of Nigeria has further complicated efforts to provide uniform educational opportunities, as many displaced or impoverished families struggle to enroll their daughters in school, recent data from UNICEF (2022) reveals that more than 60% of the 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria are girls.

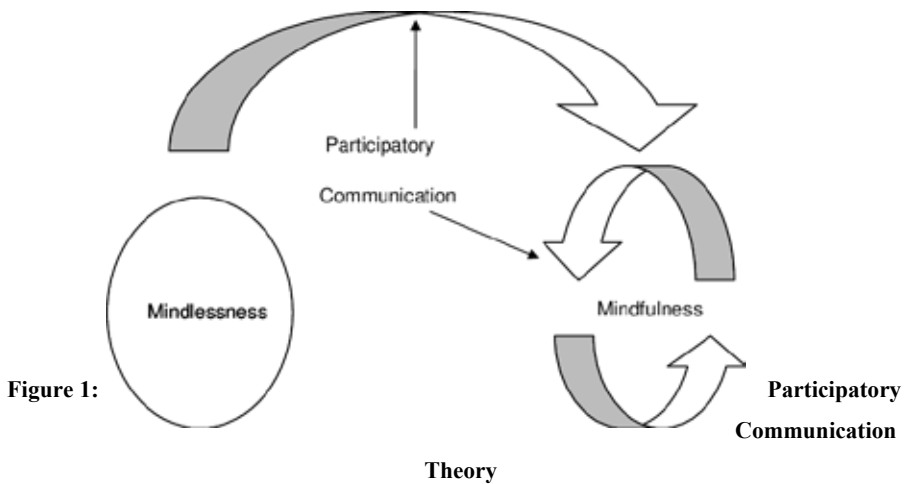
The FCT remains a strategic location for assessing the impact of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education. Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and media outlets have implemented various communication strategies, including community dialogues, radio programs, grassroots campaigns, and educational support initiatives to raise awareness and improve access to education for girls (UNICEF, 2021). This study seeks to identify effective participatory communication models that can be replicated in similar contexts across Nigeria.

Research from materials like Ajaegbo et al, 2020; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2021; UNESCO, 2022, has shown that mass media play a crucial role in raising awareness and shaping societal attitudes toward girl-child education (Tsegnyu, 2020). When combined with participatory communication strategies such as community dialogues, storytelling, and local advocacy programs, media campaigns become more impactful in addressing negative perceptions and promoting inclusive education (Kevin, 2023). Libraries and community information centres serve as vital resources for reinforcing gender-inclusive learning, providing access to knowledge that supports educational equity (Jatto et al., 2014).

Despite the promise of participatory communication, several challenges hinder its full impact on girl-child education. Cultural resistance, deeply rooted traditional norms, lack of infrastructure, and weak policy enforcement remain significant obstacles (Ughegbe, 2021). Limitations in the rural areas to access media and technological tools for leveraging participatory communication

effectively highlight the need for a multifaceted approach that integrates community-driven communication with policy reforms and institutional support.

This study aims to evaluate the impact of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, by examining the effectiveness of community-based communication strategies, assessing stakeholder contributions, and identifying best practices that can be scaled to other regions. By analysing real-life interventions and community engagement efforts, this research will provide insights into how participatory communication can foster gender equity and improve educational access for girls in Nigeria.



Statement of the Problem

Despite efforts at both national and international levels to improve education for girls, many challenges still exist, especially in rural and less developed areas of Nigeria. In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, schools in urban areas have better facilities, but girls in smaller towns and villages still struggle to get a good education. Factors such as cultural beliefs, financial difficulties, and societal misconceptions continue to limit educational opportunities for girls.

Traditional methods of advocacy have not been entirely successful in solving these issues, making it necessary to find more engaging and community-based solutions to support and sustain girl-child education. One approach that holds promise is participatory communication, which encourages open discussions, collaboration, and active involvement of the community in decision-making.

However, to understand how well this method works in FCT Abuja, tools like media campaigns, local meetings, and grassroots programs can influence attitudes and policies about girl-child education. It explores how participatory communication can help promote education for girls in FCT Abuja by examining its successes and challenges. The findings will help identify practical and lasting communication strategies that can encourage more girls to attend school and reduce gender inequality in education.

Research Objectives

- i. To examine the role of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja.
- ii. To assess the effectiveness of various participatory communication strategies used to advocate for girl-child education.
- iii. To identify the key socio-cultural and economic barriers affecting the implementation of participatory communication initiatives in FCT Abuja.
- iv. To propose policy recommendations and community-driven approaches for enhancing the impact of participatory communication in ensuring equal educational opportunities for the girl-child.

Research Hypotheses

- i. Participatory communication plays a vital role in increasing awareness and support for girl-child education in FCT Abuja.
- ii. Different participatory communication strategies have varying levels of effectiveness in advocating for girl-child education.

- iii. Socio-cultural beliefs and economic challenges impact the successful implementation of participatory communication initiatives aimed at improving girl-child education in FCT Abuja.
- iv. Strengthening policies and encouraging community-led efforts can enhance the influence of participatory communication in ensuring equal educational opportunities for girls.

Study Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on FCT Abuja, meaning that the findings may not fully represent the situation in other regions of Nigeria with different socio-cultural and economic contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and surveys may introduce biases, as responses are influenced by personal perceptions and experiences. Furthermore, financial and logistical constraints limited the study's scope, preventing a broader sample size that could enhance generalizability. Future research should consider expanding the geographical coverage and incorporating longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of participatory communication on girl-child education.

Theoretical Framework

The role of participatory communication theory in promoting girl-child education can be effectively analysed through Paulo Freire's Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasises the power of dialogue and collective action in fostering social change. According to Freire (1970), traditional communication models often reinforce societal inequalities by imposing top-down messages, whereas participatory approaches empower marginalised groups to actively engage in problem-solving. Similarly, Manyozo (2012) highlighted its application in community media and grassroots advocacy campaigns, noting that such approaches have been instrumental in promoting gender equity in education across Sub-Saharan Africa, Aina and Olorunfemi (2020) applied participatory communication frameworks in rural education campaigns and found that inclusive

dialogue with parents, traditional leaders, and girls themselves significantly increased enrollment and retention rates of girls in school. Their study concluded that empowering communities to co-create solutions led to more trust and acceptance of girl-child education initiatives, particularly in conservative settings. In FCT Abuja, where cultural and economic barriers continue to limit female education, participatory communication serves as a vital tool for advocacy. Strategies such as community discussions, media campaigns, and grassroots mobilisation enable local stakeholders to challenge restrictive norms, raise awareness, and influence policy decisions that support girl-child education. By fostering inclusive dialogue and collaboration, participatory communication creates opportunities for sustainable interventions that promote equal access to education for girls.

The Social Learning Theory highlights the role of observation and imitation in shaping behaviours, emphasising that individuals learn not only through direct experience (Bandura, 1977). In promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja, participatory communication strategies leverage this concept by showcasing educated female role models through media campaigns and community initiatives. When girls and their families observe the benefits of education, such as better career prospects and social empowerment, they are more likely to adopt positive attitudes toward schooling. However, deeply ingrained cultural norms and economic challenges may still hinder progress, requiring sustained advocacy efforts. This study applies Social Learning Theory to explore how participatory communication can reinforce educational aspirations and drive long-term social change.

Beyond individual motivation, the Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1981) emphasises the importance of community participation and self-determination in addressing social inequalities. In the promotion of girl-child education in FCT Abuja, systemic barriers such as cultural biases and economic limitations often restrict educational access for girls. By fostering participatory

communication, communities can actively engage in advocacy, policy discussions, and local initiatives that challenge these barriers and promote inclusive education. This theory aligns with the study's objective of assessing how collective action and communication strategies can empower girls, families, and communities to demand educational equity and drive sustainable social change.

The Participatory Communication Theory (Freire, 1970), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Empowerment Theory (Rappaport, 1981) collectively provide a strong theoretical foundation for assessing the role of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja. Freire's Participatory Communication Theory emphasises the importance of dialogue and community engagement in addressing social issues, making it highly relevant to this study as it highlights how interactive and inclusive communication strategies can challenge societal norms that hinder female education. Bandura's Social Learning Theory further reinforces this by explaining how behaviours and attitudes toward girl-child education are influenced by observation, imitation, and reinforcement within communities, suggesting that positive role models, media advocacy, and grassroots campaigns can shift perceptions and encourage higher female school enrollment.

Meanwhile, Rappaport's Empowerment Theory aligns with the study's objective of fostering self-determination among girls and their communities, ensuring they actively participate in decision-making processes that enhance access to education. By integrating these theories, this research underscores the need for a holistic approach where participatory communication serves as both a tool for awareness and a catalyst for behavioural and structural change in ensuring equal educational opportunities for girls in FCT Abuja.

Methodology

This study utilised a mixed-method approach, incorporating a descriptive survey research design to collect numerical data on the

effectiveness of participatory communication strategies. Additionally, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, providing a comprehensive analysis of the role of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education. And the methods include

i. Participants

The participants for this study were selected from communities across the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, where disparities in girl-child education are most prevalent. The study involved parents, teachers, community leaders, and educational policymakers who have firsthand experiences with girl-child education challenges. Additionally, young girls within school-age brackets, both enrolled and out-of-school, were included to provide diverse perspectives on the impact of participatory communication in education. A total of 150 participants were engaged, consisting of 50 students, 40 parents, 30 teachers, and 30 community stakeholders, ensuring a broad representation of views. And 7 focus group discussion (FGD) questions were used.

ii. Materials

Questionnaire

A 15-item structured questionnaire was developed to evaluate the role and effectiveness of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja. The questionnaire included a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree) for measuring attitudes and perceptions, as well as multiple-choice and open-ended questions to gather insights on demographic characteristics, awareness levels, participation experiences, challenges, and policy recommendations.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

A 7-question Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) guide was developed to facilitate in-depth discussions on the role of participatory communication in promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja. The FGDs included 6–8 participants per session, consisting of parents, educators, community leaders, and youth advocates. Discussions were moderated to ensure a structured flow, and responses were analysed to capture key trends and insights.

Literature Review

Participatory Communication

Participatory communication is a dynamic, inclusive approach that emphasises dialogue, collaboration, and active community involvement in addressing societal issues. Thomas (2009) describes it as a process that enables individuals and communities to express their concerns, contribute to decision-making, and drive collective action toward social change. In the context of this study, participatory communication is a vital tool for promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja. By fostering open discussions among key stakeholders—parents, educators, community leaders, and policymakers—it challenges existing barriers such as cultural norms, economic constraints, and institutional gaps that hinder girls' access to education.

Through engagement and shared decision-making, participatory communication empowers communities to take ownership of the educational needs of the girl child, ensuring that her right to learn is not just recognised but actively supported. Kamei (2019) highlights the transformative power of participatory communication in creating awareness, reshaping perceptions, and influencing attitudes toward education. Community-driven strategies such as advocacy through religious and traditional leaders, interactive town hall meetings, and media-based awareness campaigns help mobilise support for girl-

child education. In FCT Abuja, where gender disparities in schooling persist, these approaches bridge the gap between policies and real-life experiences, ensuring that educational interventions are rooted in local realities. By amplifying community voices and encouraging direct engagement, participatory communication strengthens the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at increasing girls' enrollment and retention in schools.

Prakash (2022) asserts that participatory communication enhances collective problem-solving and long-term sustainability in development efforts. When communities actively engage in discussions about girl-child education, they are more likely to support and sustain policies and programs that facilitate girls' learning. By integrating dialogue-driven approaches into educational advocacy, participatory communication serves as a catalyst. Based on observed practices and stakeholder reports in FCT, Abuja, participatory communication has been integrated into educational advocacy efforts, particularly through dialogue-driven platforms, school outreach, and community engagement programs. These strategies have proven catalytic in shifting societal attitudes toward girl-child education, geared towards transforming societal attitudes and ensuring sustained progress in girl-child education in FCT, Abuja.

Education

Education is a fundamental pillar of societal development, providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for personal growth and collective progress. Doharey et al. (2023) define education as a systematic process of facilitating learning, acquiring knowledge, and developing competencies that enable individuals to contribute meaningfully to society. Education exists in various forms, including formal, informal, and non-formal learning, each serving a unique purpose in shaping human development. In the context of this study, education is not merely a tool for academic achievement but a crucial instrument for empowering girls, enabling them to break societal barriers, and equipping them with

the necessary resources for self-sufficiency and active participation in socio-economic activities. By examining the role of participatory communication, this research aims to highlight how community engagement and dialogue-driven initiatives enhance educational access and retention for the girl child in FCT, Abuja.

Abdulghani Al-Shuaibi (2014) explores the importance of education in fostering individual empowerment, economic growth, and social transformation. For girls, education is particularly significant as it reduces gender inequality, enhances health outcomes, and strengthens community resilience. However, in many communities, cultural norms, economic constraints, and traditional mindsets continue to limit girls' access to quality education. Participatory communication, through its interactive and community-based approach, helps address these challenges by creating awareness, reshaping perceptions, and fostering inclusive decision-making. Strategies such as grassroots advocacy, local media campaigns, and direct engagement with parents and community leaders play a critical role in encouraging families to prioritise girl-child education. In FCT Abuja, where gender disparities persist, participatory communication bridges the gap between educational policies and their practical implementation, ensuring that more girls can enroll and remain in school.

Adesemowo et al. (2022) highlight that education extends beyond academic instruction to include the development of critical thinking, social skills, and civic responsibility. The participatory communication approach aligns with this broader view of education by fostering collaboration among key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, policymakers, and community influencers, to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Within this framework, participatory communication functions not merely as an awareness tool but as a mechanism for mobilising community ownership and sustaining collective action in support of girl-child education. By integrating participatory methods into educational advocacy, long-term solutions can be developed to

overcome existing barriers, ensuring that every girl in FCT, Abuja, has access to quality education and the opportunity to reach her full potential. Scholars such as Manyozo (2012) and Servaes (2008) have emphasised the capacity of participatory strategies to dismantle top-down educational models, replacing them with frameworks that prioritise local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and empowerment.

Girl-Child Education

Girl-child education means providing learning opportunities for young girls to gain knowledge, skills, and values that help them grow and contribute to society. According to Shaifali (2016), education is a basic right that can transform communities and improve lives. Several studies have shown that in Nigeria, girls' access to education remains significantly constrained by cultural norms, economic hardship, and the prevalence of early marriage. For instance, Okeke et al. (2012) emphasise that traditional gender roles and societal expectations often prioritise domestic responsibilities over formal education for girls. Similarly, Afolabi and Loto (2017) highlight poverty as a key factor, noting that in many low-income households, limited resources are allocated preferentially to boys' education. Furthermore, according to UNICEF (2020), early marriage remains a persistent barrier, particularly in rural communities, where adolescent girls are frequently withdrawn from school to assume marital and reproductive roles.

Mahmoud Fahmy Fathalla (2000) explains that education empowers girls to make better decisions about their future, careers, and health. In FCT, Abuja, many girls are deprived of education, making it necessary to find ways to remove these barriers and create equal opportunities for them to learn. Celestina (2024) states that educating girls is important for national development, as it helps build a stronger economy and a more stable society. However, harmful traditions and financial difficulties often prevent girls from going to school. Although education is widely recognised as a tool

for development, gendered disparities persist in many parts of FCT, Abuja, where communities often prioritise boys' education over that of girls.

While Fred (2024) argues that girl-child education must be framed not only as a development issue but also as a matter of fundamental human rights, other scholars emphasise the role of cultural norms and socio-economic constraints. For instance, Akinwale and Yusuf (2020) highlight that traditional gender role continues to influence educational choices within families, often to the detriment of girls. In contrast, Ijeoma (2021) suggests that increased community engagement through participatory advocacy can shift these deeply rooted attitudes. By integrating these perspectives, it becomes evident that addressing educational inequality requires not just policy interventions but also a value-based approach that positions girls' education within the broader framework of social justice and equity. Participatory communication plays a key role in solving this problem by involving communities in discussions and decision-making. Through awareness programs, local meetings, and media campaigns, people can better understand the importance of educating girls. By working together, parents, teachers, and community leaders can create an environment where every girl gets the chance to go to school and succeed.

Data Analysis

This analysis of data on participatory communication and its impact on promoting girl-child education in FCT, Abuja. The analysis integrates both quantitative data from the structured questionnaire and qualitative insights from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). It explores key aspects such as awareness levels, communication methods, challenges, and the effectiveness of participatory communication strategies in addressing barriers to girl-child education. Findings from the questionnaire reveal that 83% of participants believe girl-child education is very important for community development, yet

significant challenges persist. The most common barriers identified include economic hardship (74%), cultural and religious beliefs (62%), and early marriage (58%). These findings align with FGD discussions, where participants emphasised that many families still prioritise boys' education due to financial constraints and deep-rooted cultural norms. One respondent stated:

“In our community, some parents think investing in a girl’s education is a waste because she will marry and leave. We need to change this mindset through awareness programs.”

The role of participatory communication was also assessed. 68% of respondents frequently hear about girl-child education through community programs, religious leaders, and local media, highlighting the importance of grassroots advocacy. FGD participants agreed that traditional leaders and community discussions significantly influence parental attitudes. One participant shared:

“Whenever religious leaders speak about the benefits of girl-child education, parents listen. It helps change their views over time.”

Despite the benefits of participatory communication, challenges remain. Limited access to communication tools (59%) and resistance to change in cultural beliefs (65%) were identified as major obstacles. FGD respondents stressed that while awareness campaigns exist, they are often inconsistent, lack government support. Recommendations from both datasets emphasise stronger community engagement (72%), increased government-backed awareness programs (66%), and scholarships for girls (61%) to promote long-term educational access.

Table 1: Summary of FGDs Results

S/N	FDG Questions	Key Findings	Percentage (%)
1.	What are the most common barriers preventing girls from accessing quality education?	Economic hardship	83%
		Cultural and religious beliefs	71%
		Early marriage	62%
2.	How effective have community-driven communication approaches been in promoting girl-child education?	Town hall meetings and radio programs are effective.	58%
		Traditional and religious leaders need more engagement.	49%
		Local media campaigns are underutilised.	42%
3.	How do families and communities respond to messages advocating girl-child education?	Positive shifts in attitudes due to awareness campaigns.	66%
		Resistance from older generations with traditional views	53%
		Success stories of educated girls can improve acceptance.	47%
4.	What role do schools and educators play in supporting participatory communication for girl-child education?	Schools play a crucial role in awareness and mentorship.	72%

5.	Have you witnessed any successful participatory communication initiatives for girl-child education?	Government and NGO-led campaigns have made a significant impact.	61%
		Community-led programs with women leaders advocating for girls' rights	46%
		Media, schools, and religious institutions working together improve messaging.	38%
6.	What are the biggest challenges faced in advocating for girl-child education?	Deep-rooted cultural norms hinder progress.	69%
		Financial constraints limit awareness campaigns.	57%
		Inadequate government support and weak policies	48%
7.	What policies or community-driven approaches should be implemented to improve girl-child education?	Increased government involvement and funding	75%
		Greater engagement of religious and traditional leaders	62%
		Use of digital communication strategies for wider outreach	54%

Table 1 summarizes the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) findings, presenting key insights and their corresponding percentages based on participant responses.

Table 2: Summary of Questionnaire Results

S/N	Section	Key Findings	Percentage (%)
1.	Demographic Information	Gender Distribution	Male (45%), Female (53%), Prefer not to say (2%)
		Education Level	No Formal (10%), Primary (20%), Secondary (40%), Tertiary (25%), Other (5%)
		Community Role	Parents (35%), Teachers (25%), Students (20%), Community Leaders (10%), Government/NGO (8%), Other (2%)
		Area of Residence	Urban (30%), Peri-Urban (40%), Rural (30%)
2.	Awareness & Perception	Importance of Girl-Child Education	Very Important (75%), Important (20%), Neutral (3%), Not Important (2%)
		Major Barriers to Girl-Child Education	Economic Hardship (65%), Cultural Beliefs (55%), Early Marriage (50%), Domestic Responsibilities (40%), Inadequate Schools (30%), Parental Disinterest (20%)
3.	Role of Participatory Communication	Frequency of Awareness Programs	Very Often (20%), Often (30%), Occasionally (35%), Rarely (10%), Never (5%)
		Most Effective Communication Methods	Community Dialogues (55%), Religious Leaders (60%), Radio/TV (50%), Social-Media (40%), Schools (45%), Government Policies (35%)
		Participation in Discussions/Programs	Yes, Multiple Times (30%), Yes, Once (20%), Aware but Never Participated (35%), Never Heard of Programs (15%)
4.	Impact of Participatory Communication	Effectiveness of Participatory Communication	Significant Improvement (35%), Some Improvement (50%), No Improvement (10%), Not Sure (5%)
		Most Active Advocates	Religious Leaders (55%), Teachers/Schools (50%), Parents (30%), NGOs (40%), Youth Groups (35%)
		Challenges in Communication Efforts	Cultural Resistance (50%), Lack of Awareness (45%), Poor Media Access (40%), Weak Government Support (35%), Financial Constraints (55%)
5.	Recommendations & Policy Suggestions	Strategies to Improve Communication	Religious Leaders' Involvement (60%), Government Programs (55%), Digital Media (50%), Scholarships (70%), Stronger Laws (65%)

		How Schools Can Contribute	Community Engagement (55%), Parent Involvement (45%), Media Advocacy (50%), Mentorship Programs (60%)
		Policy Recommendations	Increased Government Funding, Stronger Law Enforcement, Teacher Training, Community Participation, Media Expansion

Table 2 provides a clear overview of the key findings from the questionnaire responses, making it easier to analyse trends and policy recommendations.

Discussion of Findings

Participatory communication plays a vital role in promoting girl-child education in FCT, Abuja. On one hand, it fosters awareness, encourages community involvement, and strengthens advocacy efforts to ensure that girls have access to quality education. Various communication strategies, including community dialogues, media campaigns, and stakeholder engagements, have contributed to changing societal perceptions and reinforcing the importance of educating girls. Through participatory approaches, parents, teachers, and policymakers collaborate to address cultural and economic barriers that hinder girls from attending school.

However, despite these promising developments, significant challenges persist in ensuring full participation in girl-child education. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) responses and statistical analysis revealed that socio-cultural norms remain a major obstacle (65%), as deep-rooted beliefs and gender stereotypes continue to limit educational opportunities for girls. Many parents still prioritise boys' education over girls', leading to higher dropout rates among female students. Furthermore, early marriage pressures and domestic responsibilities further restrict girls' access to consistent learning, as identified by 58% of participants. Another critical issue highlighted in the discussion is financial constraints, which 72% of respondents

cited as a key challenge. Many families struggle to afford school fees, uniforms, and learning materials, making it difficult for girls to remain in school. Even in cases where tuition is free, hidden costs such as transportation and examination fees create financial burdens that prevent continuous education.

Additionally, inadequate government support and the lack of targeted financial aid programs further exacerbate the situation. The role of school infrastructure and learning environments also emerged as a significant factor, with 61% of participants stating that poor facilities negatively impact girl-child education. Many schools lack adequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, and learning resources, making it challenging for girls to thrive academically. The absence of gender-friendly school policies, such as separate restrooms and menstrual hygiene support, discourages many girls from attending school regularly, particularly in rural communities.

The influence of participatory communication in addressing these issues cannot be overlooked. 59% of respondents agreed that community-driven educational initiatives have helped shift attitudes towards girl-child education. Public awareness campaigns, engagement with religious and traditional leaders, and the use of storytelling and testimonials have proven effective in challenging discriminatory norms and increasing enrollment rates. Additionally, the involvement of local media in promoting the success stories of educated girls has encouraged parents to reconsider their stance on female education. Despite these efforts, more needs to be done to ensure sustainable progress. The findings suggest that government policies and intervention programs must be strengthened to provide financial support, improve school infrastructure, and enforce laws against gender-based educational discrimination. A majority (67%) of participants recommended the establishment of scholarship schemes and conditional cash transfer programs to support financially disadvantaged families. Furthermore, advocacy groups and civil society organisations should expand their outreach efforts,

particularly in rural communities, to reinforce the importance of girl-child education.

By prioritising participatory communication strategies, investing in educational resources, and fostering an inclusive learning environment, FCT, Abuja, can create a future where every girl has equal access to quality education. The collective efforts of government agencies, community leaders, and stakeholders will be essential in transforming societal attitudes and ensuring that girls receive the education they deserve.

Conclusion

Participatory communication remains a crucial tool in promoting girl-child education in FCT Abuja. It fosters awareness, strengthens advocacy, and encourages community involvement in breaking long-standing socio-cultural barriers that hinder girls' access to quality education. The findings of this study reveal that while participatory communication has contributed to shifting societal perceptions and increasing enrollment rates, significant challenges persist. Socio-cultural norms (65%), financial constraints (72%), and inadequate school infrastructure (61%) continue to pose major obstacles to girl-child education, limiting the effectiveness of existing interventions.

Despite these challenges, participatory communication has demonstrated its potential in transforming attitudes and mobilising communities to support girl-child education. Public awareness campaigns, stakeholder engagements, and media advocacy have played a critical role in addressing gender-based educational disparities. However, financial limitations remain a pressing issue, preventing many girls from benefiting from educational opportunities even in cases where tuition is free. Without targeted support mechanisms such as scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and community-driven assistance programs, the gap in educational attainment between boys and girls is likely to persist.

To ensure sustainable progress, a holistic approach is needed. Strengthening government policies to enforce gender-equitable education, investing in school infrastructure, and expanding financial aid programs will be essential in overcoming these challenges. Furthermore, community-driven participatory communication strategies should be reinforced to address deeply ingrained socio-cultural beliefs that discourage female education. Empowering local leaders, religious figures, and educators to serve as advocates will further enhance awareness and drive positive change.

By implementing structured policies that promote inclusivity, financial support, and infrastructural development, girl-child education in FCT, Abuja, can become more accessible and sustainable. The collaboration of policymakers, community stakeholders, and civil society organisations will be instrumental in ensuring that no girl is denied her right to education due to cultural biases or financial hardships. With concerted efforts, participatory communication can catalyse educational equity, empowering girls to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

Recommendations

- i. **Strengthen Government Policies:** The government should implement and enforce gender-equitable education policies, including strict laws against gender-based discrimination in schools and early marriage practices.
- ii. **Improve Financial Support Programs:** Scholarships, conditional cash transfers, and school feeding programs should be expanded to support financially disadvantaged families and reduce dropout rates among girls.
- iii. **Enhance School Infrastructure:** Investments should be made in building more classrooms, improving sanitation facilities, and providing essential learning materials to create a more conducive learning environment for girls.

- iv. **Promote Community Engagement:** Religious leaders, traditional rulers, and community stakeholders should be actively involved in advocacy programs to challenge cultural stereotypes that hinder girl-child education.
- v. **Expand Media and Awareness Campaigns:** Public enlightenment initiatives using radio, television, and social media should be intensified to educate communities on the long-term benefits of girl-child education.

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