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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SIERRA LEONE'S NATIONAL POLICY ON RADICAL INCLUSION TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY AND PROMOTE EQUAL ACCESS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION

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Abstract

Muigua and Deem emphasize the importance of gender equality in educational opportunities, pointing out that education is a fundamental human right and a driver of socio-economic development. According to Kamara, Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy is a remarkable case study that highlights the relevance of gender equality in education provision. This study used a purposive sampling technique to sample 15 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, 5 school administrators, 5 policymakers, and 5 community members. Barrie also discusses the challenges faced by children in poverty and the benefits of education, as well as government efforts to improve transparency and accountability in primary education in Sierra Leone. Wechter, Terrell, Gupta, and Peterson state that free quality school education (FQSE) is a key policy priority of the Government of Sierra Leone in national transformation through education. According to the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report, Iceland accounts for 85% of the total gender gap, making it the most gender-equal country. A total of 40 participants were randomly selected, who were involved in developing targeted strategies that address the unique challenges girls face in accessing quality education. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis were used to analyze the data collected using percentages, and graphs, for data collected through questionnaires, whereas a description of findings was used for data collected through interviews and data collected through observations. The study aims to assess the effective implementation of Sierra Leone's national policy on radical inclusion to address gender inequality and promote equal access to girls' education. Gender equality has improved significantly, from the basic level of students in primary and secondary education to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as the number of lecturers and teachers in schools and universities in general. The result revealed that the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in schools for excluded and marginalized children has been effectively carried out as indicated in the results from the perspectives of women beneficiaries, it is shown that the majority of them believe that women beneficiaries of

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radical inclusion policies value the policies and that they are beneficial to their lives and that progress has been made in the awareness and implementation of this policy, which is having a positive impact on women beneficiaries which is an indication that the government's objectives have been achieved.

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Introduction:-

Muigua, (2018) and Deem, (2018) emphasize the importance of gender equality in educational opportunities, stating that education is a fundamental human right and a driver of socio-economic development. A comprehensive education must be provided to achieve personal, economic, and social development goals. Facilitating learning and promoting equal opportunities requires the development of policies that support inclusive education at all levels (Terzi, 2014). In an educational system that values social justice, it is important to promote the intellectual development and overall well-being of students. The goal of inclusive education is to remove barriers to education and provide the resources necessary to achieve this (Spandagou, 2021).

Gender equality has improved significantly, from the basic level of pupils at primary and secondary levels, through to undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and the number of lecturers and teachers in schools and universities in general (Petersen, 2020). This means that the reasons and solutions for improving gender equality in education should be the same, but they are not. It is essential to the form of society that men and women have equal rights and their own lives (Ararat & Yurtoglu, 2021). In recent years, Sweden has shifted its focus to gender equality and is now considered a model for other countries (Lane & Jordansson, 2020). This country is a role model when it comes to gender equality, but there is still much work to be done.

According to Kamara, (2020), Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy is a remarkable case study that highlights the relevance of gender equality in education provision. As a result, achieving gender equality in education has become critical to promoting sustainable development and social cohesion in Sierra Leone. The Radical Inclusion Policy launched by the Department of Education and Science in 2018 aims to address the barriers faced by marginalized and excluded groups (Pather, 2019). Peterson et al., (2022) stated that free quality school education (FQSE) is a key policy priority of the Government of Sierra Leone for national transformation through education. Kiendrebeogo & Wodon (2020) asserted that the government of Sierra Leone is making active efforts to introduce and implement free and quality education nationwide. Barrie (2022) also discusses the challenges faced by children in poverty and the benefits of education, as well as government efforts to improve transparency and accountability in primary education in Sierra Leone. The study aims at assessing the effective implementation of Sierra Leone's national policy on radical inclusion to address gender inequality and promote equal access to girls' education.

Aim/Objectives:-

The study aims at assessing the effective implementation of Sierra Leone's national policy on radical inclusion to address gender inequality and promote equal access to girls' education with specific focus on the following objectives:

1. To assess the effective implementation of the National Policy on Radical inclusion in schools for excluded and marginalized children.
2. To evaluate the extent to which the governments' objectives have been achieved

Materials and Methods:-

Study design

Qualitative research designs suitable for evaluating gender equality and radical inclusion policies in education in Sierra Leone may include multiple methods such as interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis. These methods allow researchers to collect rich, nuanced data from multiple perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of a topic.

The research design and methodology of this study were born out of the need to achieve the main objectives of the study. This study used a descriptive research design, specifically involving a partial survey, and was based on qualitative methods of data collection. This design is used because the results of such research methods are easily

applicable to the entire population, time-saving, and cost-effective. This study used a qualitative design that helps maximize the benefits of a qualitative approach. Data collection choices and patterns include examination of primary and secondary data. Primary data provided the opportunity to meet or contact respondents in person and interview them. This is done to obtain first-hand information about the topic being researched, whereas secondary research primarily deals with theoretical insights and literature from other authors.

Study area

The study will be conducted in several selected communities and schools in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The city is divided into three geographical areas. The east end, the center end, and the west end. The city of Freetown is geographically located on the western peninsula of the country. According to Bandiera et al., (2020), Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, is an ideal research area to assess gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities, with a particular focus on the experiences of girls. However, Freetown offers a unique case study in qualitative research methods by implementing a radical inclusion policy aimed at removing barriers and promoting gender equality in schools.

Yoder et al., (2016) argue that Freetown is a diverse city encompassing different sociocultural aspects that influence the implementation and effectiveness of policies promoting gender equality in education. Sam-Kpakra et al., (2023) demonstrated that qualitative research in Freetown allows for the exploration of barriers that girls face in accessing educational opportunities. Interviews and focus groups with parents, community leaders, and educators highlight the specific challenges faced by girls in Freetown and provide insight into the effectiveness of radical inclusion policies to address these barriers. Through qualitative research in Freetown, researchers examined policy implementation, alignment with community norms and beliefs, and policy effectiveness in promoting gender equality. Barrie (2022) argued that by using Freetown as a case study, researchers can comprehensively examine the politics of gender equality and radical inclusion in specific contexts. By focusing on Freetown, researchers captured the nuances and complexities of gender equality in Sierra Leone's capital, providing insights that can inform policies and programs at local, regional, and national levels, Freetown serves as an ideal region. A qualitative research methodology study on gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities, with a particular focus on the experiences of girls, and socio-cultural backgrounds. By examining the impact of access, quality of education, and radical policy inclusion in Sierra Leone, researchers contributed to evidence-based strategies to promote gender equality in education in Freetown and other settings.

Population

A population is a complete group of individuals, cases, or objects with observable characteristics, and a target population is the population that is the subject of a study whose purpose is to generalize the results of the study (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). This study focuses on educators, parents, teachers, and students in selected communities and schools in Freetown. Those with access include school administrators, teachers, students, educators, and parents. This study used random sampling techniques to collect data from 40 participants being the target population for this study. Participants included 15 pupils, 5 parents, 5 teachers, 5 school administrators, and 5 policy makers and 5 community members involved in developing targeted strategies to address the unique challenges faced by girls. It focuses on Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policies and aims to assess gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities. This sample allowed for in-depth exploration and analysis of the experiences and perspectives of girls, parents, teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and community members. Finally, researchers conducted a pilot study or engaged in an interactive process of data collection and analysis to determine sample size adequacy and assess data saturation. This approach ensured that the study gained a comprehensive understanding of gender equality in girls' educational opportunities in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy.

Sample size and sampling procedures

Sampling Method

The researchers utilized the purposive sampling technique in this research study to assess gender equality in educational opportunities for girls in Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy.

While random sampling techniques have advantages, purposive sampling allows researchers to focus on key informants and generate nuanced insights important for informing policy and practice (Hine, 2015).

Sample size

This study used a purposive sampling technique to sample 15 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers, and 5 school administrators, and 5 policymakers and 5 community members. A total of 40 participants were selected, who were involved in developing targeted strategies that address the unique challenges girls face in accessing quality education. A case study that focuses on Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy and assesses gender equality in the provision of educational opportunities. Purposive sampling gave researchers the freedom to select participants to achieve high levels of validity and reliability (Opoku et al., 2016). Gender equality in education is an important issue and requires comprehensive research to understand and address the unique challenges girls face. Sierra Leone's radical inclusion policy aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all, especially girls. This study was successful because of the data collection method used by the researchers. Group discussions, interviews, and direct observations will be conducted on issues related to gender equality in the provision of quality educational opportunities in Western Sierra Leone. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to collect data regarding the purpose of the topic.

Qualitative data analysis was used to analyze issues related to gender equality and ensure that contextual meanings were presented consistently. These methods allowed for a deep understanding of attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions among teachers, parents, and pupils, thereby creating trust.

Data collection method

Data for this study was sourced from two sources viz, primary and secondary sources.

The primary data was collected through:

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

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

Data presentation and analysis**Data Presentation**

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

Data Analysis:

In this study, raw data took various forms including questionnaire responses, observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to present and analyze

the data that was collected. The raw data was presented in tables, graphs, and charts. Qualitative data analysis involves coding, categorizing, and interpreting the collected data. Researchers can identify recurring themes related to gender inequality, access to education, cultural barriers, policy effectiveness, and the impact of radical inclusion policies on girls. Qualitative research methodologies provide a valuable approach to assessing gender equality in education, focusing primarily on girls' experiences. Using a variety of methods, including interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and advances related to gender equality in education. By using qualitative research methods, we can contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to achieve gender equality in education, not only in Sierra Leone but around the world. The data analysis method was descriptive qualitative analysis and the quantitative data were triangulated using graphs and tables. The collected quantitative data were coded and categorized according to the items of the semi-structured questionnaire using frequency distribution tables. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) and results were presented as frequency tables, graphs, and percentages.

Results and Analysis:-

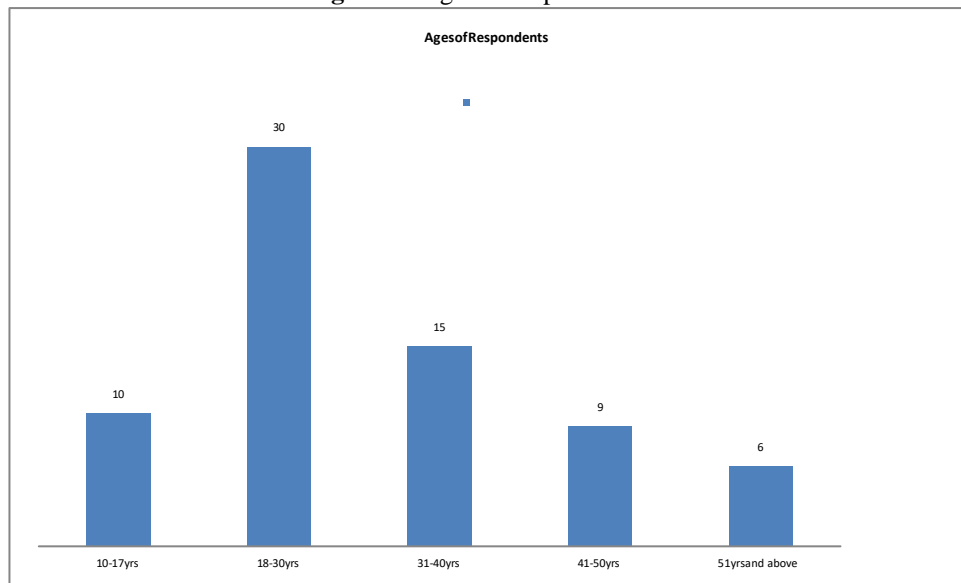
Demographic characteristics of respondents

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

Ages of Respondents

Figure 1 displays the age categories of respondent.

Figure 1:- Ages of Respondents.



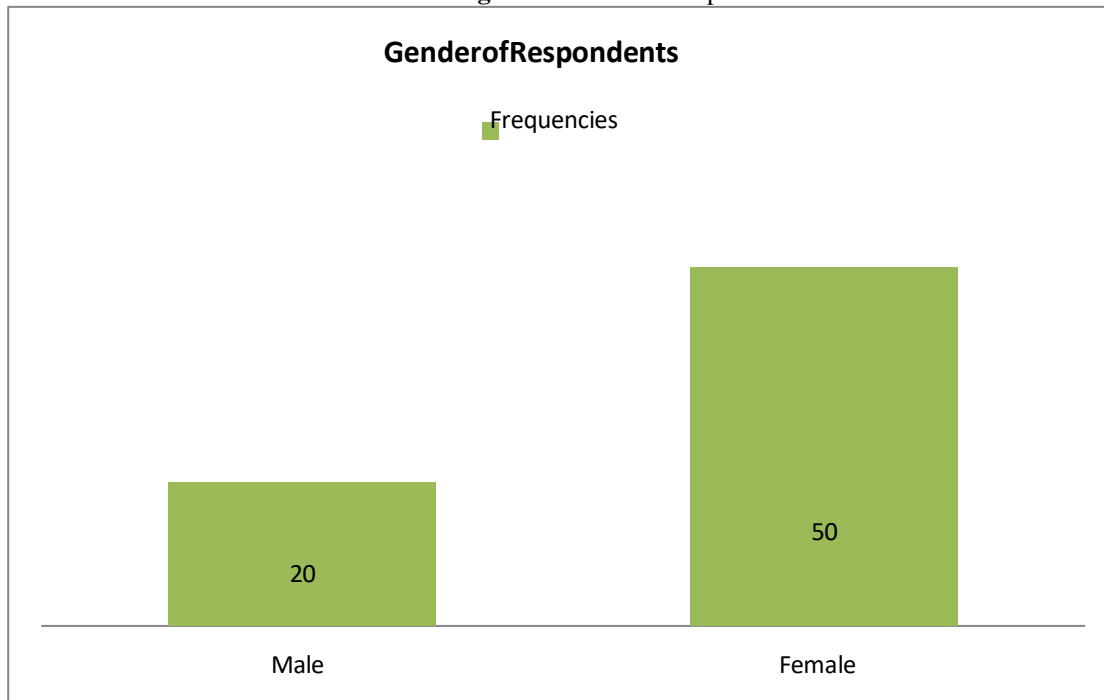
Source: Field Research, 2023

The results as shown in Figure 1 shows that the age of the respondents ranged from 10 years to over 51 years. The results in Figure 1 shows that the number of respondents between the ages of 10 and 17 is 10, making it 14% of the total respondents. The frequency of 18-30 years old is 30, accounting for 43% of respondents, the age group of 31-40 years old is 15, accounting for 21% of respondents, and the frequency of the age group of 41-50 years old is 9, representing 13% of the respondents. If the age category is 51 years or older, the frequency is 6, representing 9% of respondents. The results in Figure 1 shows that there is a relationship between respondents' age and their involvement in gender issues. More respondents seemed to be between 18 years old and 40 years old, with a total frequency of 45 and respondents were 64%.

Gender of Respondents

The results of respondents' gender status are represented in Figure 2

Figure 2:- Gender of Respondents.



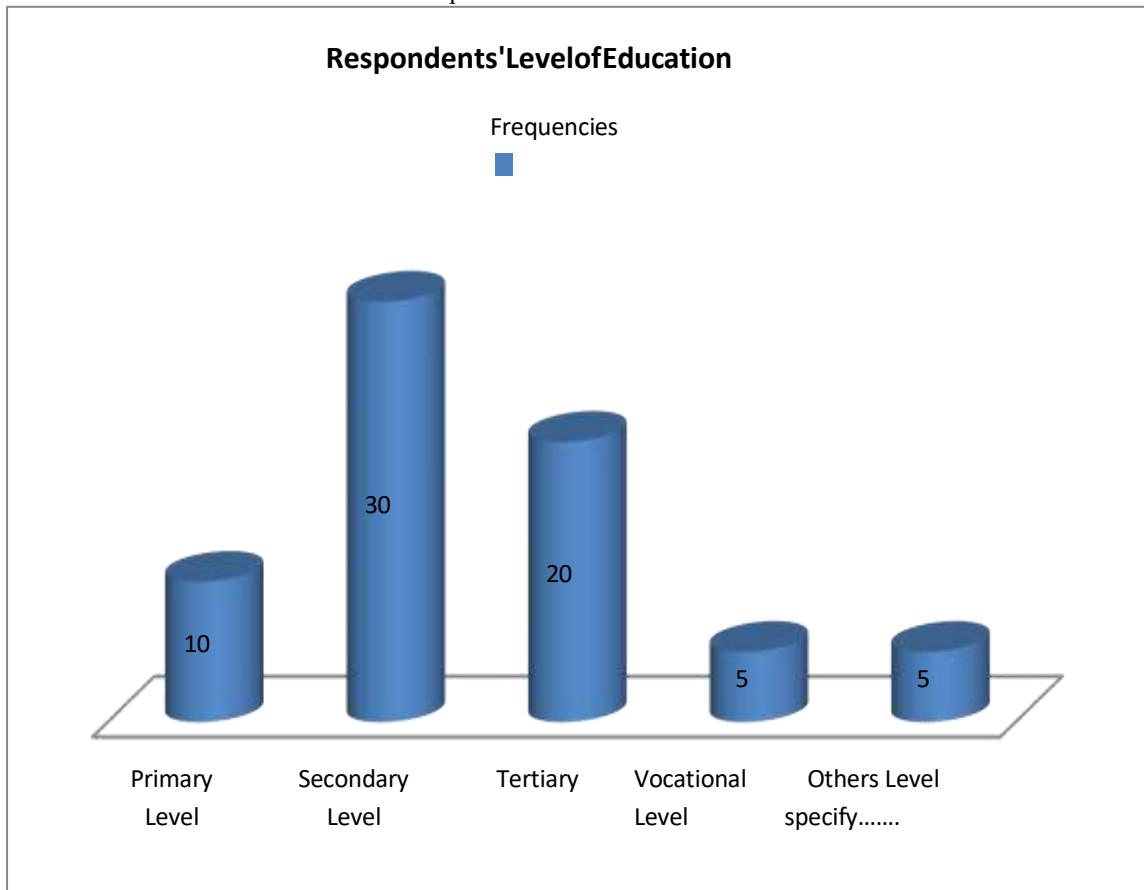
Source: Field Research, 2023

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

Respondents' Level of Education

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

Figure3:-
Respondents' Level of Education.



Source: Field data, 2023

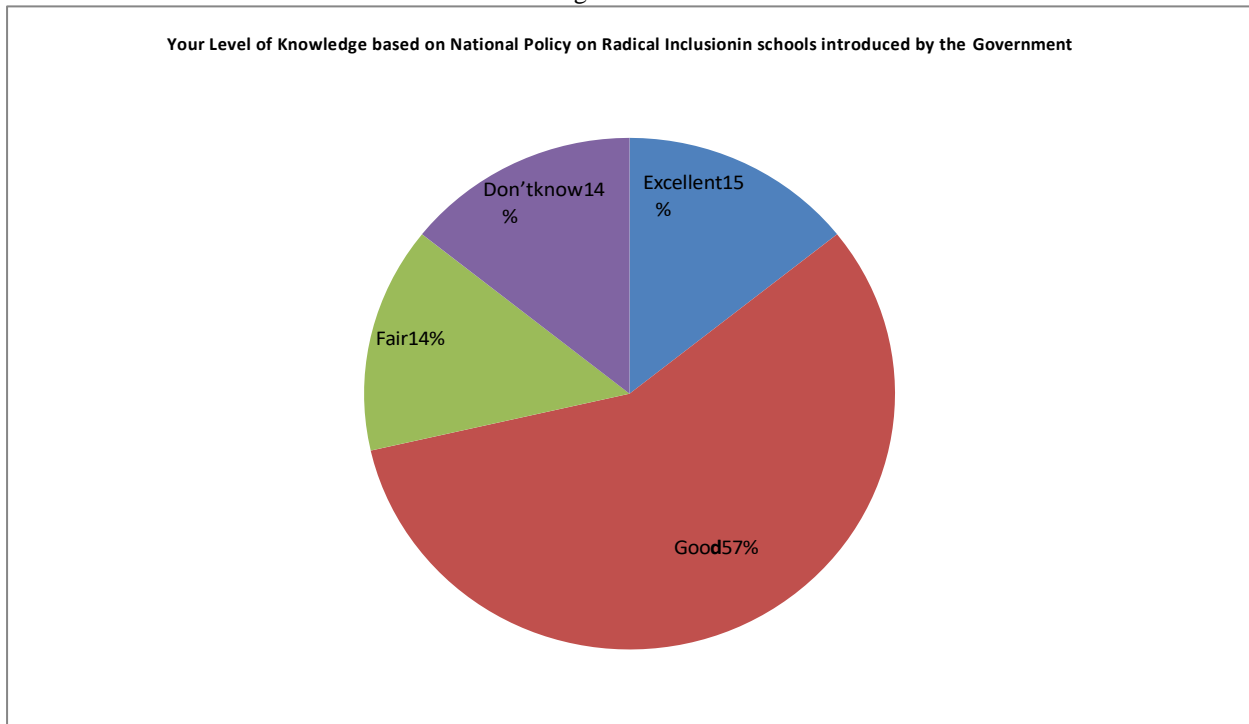
The education level of the respondents as in Figure 3 shows that the education level of the majority of the respondents falls into the secondary education category with the frequency of 30 accounting for (43%) of respondents and the primary education category 10 accounted for (14%) of the respondents,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

This accounted for (7%) of the total, and 5 corresponds to (7%) of the total number of respondents.

Assessing the effectiveness of the National Policy on Radical inclusion in schools for excluded and marginalized children.

The level of knowledge of the National Policy on Radical inclusion in schools for excluded and marginalized children.

Figure 4:- Below shows the level of knowledge of the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in school for excluded and marginalized children.



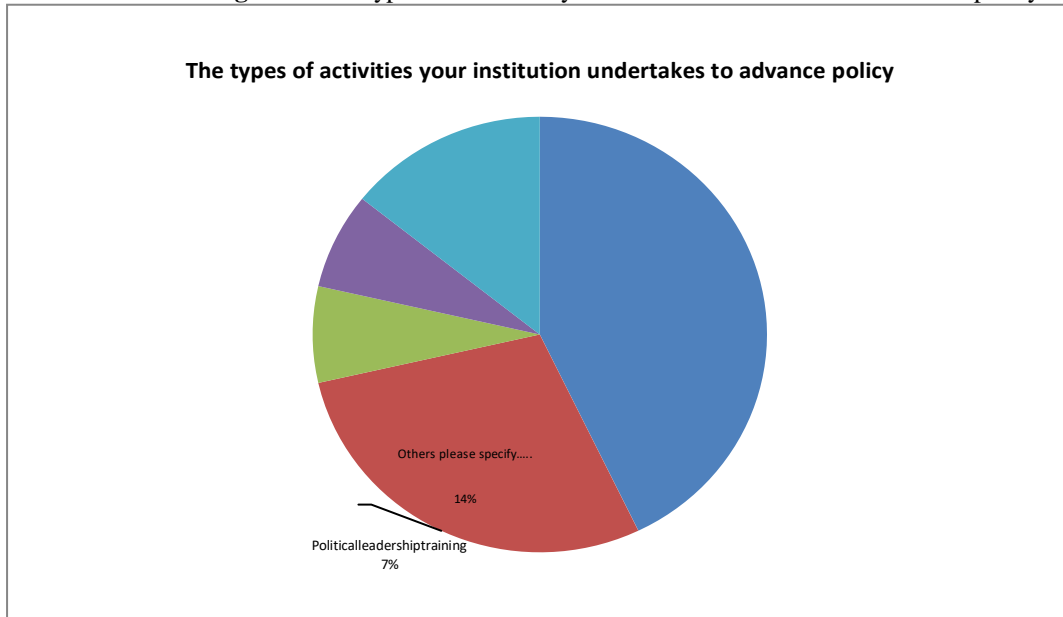
Source: Field Research, 2023

Figure 4 shows that 10 out of (15%) of the respondents reported having good knowledge about the national policy on radical inclusion in schools and a frequency of 40, corresponding to (57%) of the respondents, indicates that they reported having good knowledge of national policies regarding inclusion. National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools of the frequency, 10 respondents (14%) responded that they had sufficient knowledge about the national policy on radical inclusion in schools introduced by the government; 10 respondents (14%) answered that they don't know anything about the national policy regarding radical inclusion in schools that the government has introduced. This result shows that some of the respondents have good knowledge about the national policy on radical inclusion in schools introduced by the government

The types of activities your institution undertakes to advance policy

Results on the statement “the kinds of activities carried out by your institution in promoting the policy” are presented in Figure 5

Figure5:- Thetypes of activities your institution undertakes to advance policy.

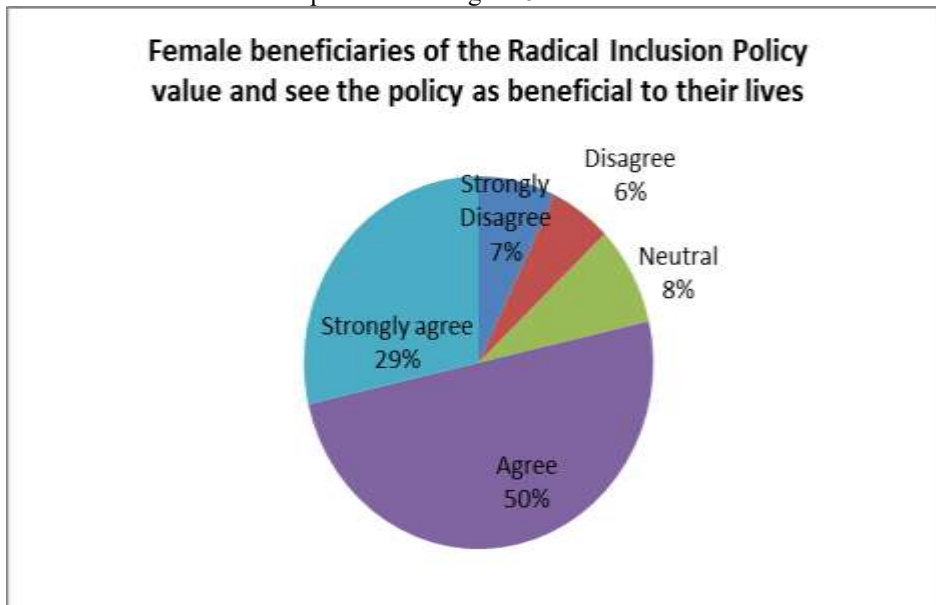


Source: FieldResearch,2023

The results in Figure 7 shows that a frequency of 30, corresponding to (43%) of respondents, identified radical enrollment of girls and excluded people as a type of activity carried out by educational institutions to promote policies; On the other hand, a frequency of 20, representing (29%) of respondents, indicated that they identified gender-inclusive activities for women. School children are included as a type of activity carried out by educational institutions to promote policy, with a frequency of 5 and corresponding to (7%) of the identified activities. Developing girls' abilities, 5 activities accounted for (7%) of identified political leadership training and 10 accounted for (7%) of other activities identified, such as motivational programs for high-achieving girls and other girls empowerment programs.

Female beneficiaries of the Radical inclusion policy value and see the policy as beneficial to their lives.

The results on the statement ‘‘Female beneficiaries of the Radical inclusion policy value and see the policy as beneficial to their lives’’ are presented in Figure 6



Source: field research, 2023

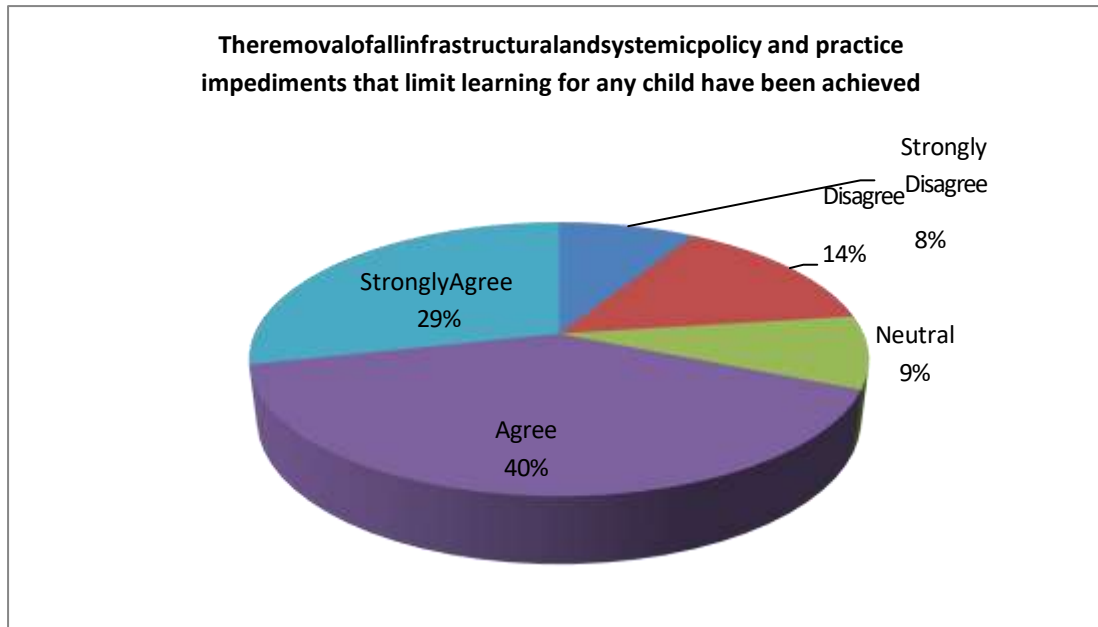
The results as in Figure 6 shows that 13% of respondents representing the frequency of 9 disagreed that women who are beneficiaries of radical inclusion policies value the policies and think that they are beneficial to their lives. However, the frequency with which respondents agreed with this statement was 55 (79%), and the frequency with which respondents had no opinion on this statement was 6 (8%). These results indicate that the majority of respondents believe that women who are beneficiaries of radical inclusion policies value the policies and consider them beneficial to their lives.

An evaluation of the extent to which the governments’ objectives have been achieved

The removal of all infrastructural and systemic policy and practice impediments that limit learning for any child have be achieved

Responses of respondents on the statement “The removal of all infrastructural and systemic policy and practice impediments that limit learning for any child have been achieved” are presented in Figure 7

Figure7:- Theremovalofallinfrastructuralandsystemicpolicyandpracticeimpediments that limit learning for any child have been achieved.



Source:FieldResearch,2023

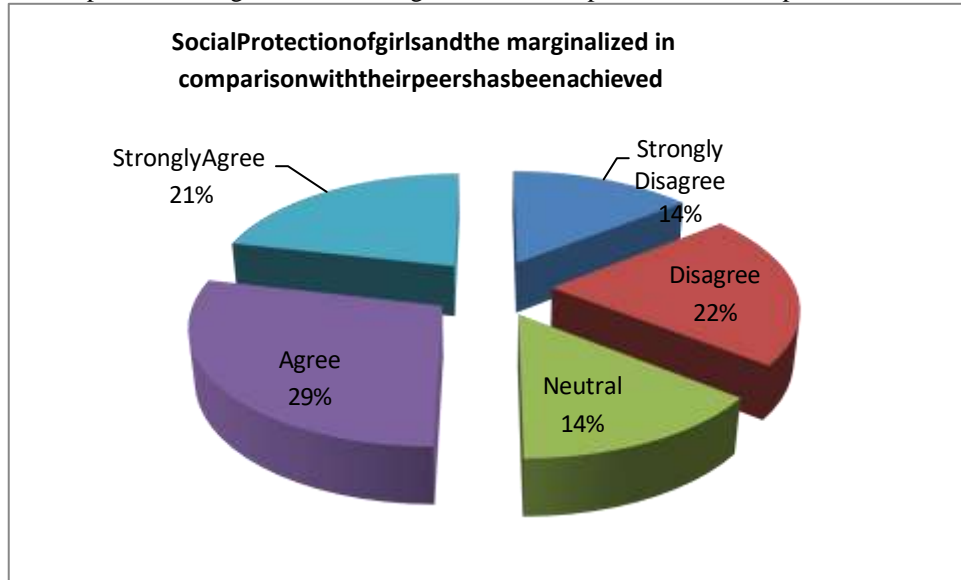
The findings in Figure 9 shows that 16 in the frequency of respondents accounted for (22%), did not agree that the removal of all infrastructure and system policies and practical barriers that limit children's learning had been achieved. The results show that 48 frequencies, representing (69%) of respondents, agree with this statement, while 6 frequencies, representing (9%) of respondents, have a neutral position on this statement. These results indicate that the majority of respondents agree that the removal of all infrastructure and system policies and practical barriers that limit children's learning has been achieved. This result contradicts Munhoz's (2018) findings that Latin American and Caribbean countries have made significant progress in gender equality in education statistics, both in terms of access and school performance. However, serious obstacles to the full realization of girls and women's human right to education go far beyond access to and treatment in schools.

According to Munhoz, the main obstacles include child labor (particularly in domestic work), early marriage and pregnancy, armed conflict (particularly affecting girls and women), poverty, the influence of religion on education policy decisions, and violence. This includes the nuisance and dangerous school environment. In particular, the repeated discriminatory acts in schools reflect the predominantly macho, patriarchal, heteronormative, and heterosexist ideological and cultural structures in society, which violate many human rights, particularly violence and discrimination. It violates the right to a life of dignity.

Social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers has been achieved

The results on the statement “social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers has been achieved” are demonstrated in Figure 8

Figure 8:- Social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers has been achieved.



Source: Field research, 2023.

The results in Figure 8 show that 25 respondents, or 36% of the respondents, did not agree that social protection of girls and marginalized groups has been achieved compared to other groups. Participants that agreed with this statement have a frequency of 35, representing 50%, and 10 participants, representing 14% of respondents, agreed that social protection for girls and marginalized groups Neutral on statements regarding the achievements of individuals compared to others. The results show that half of the respondents agree that social protection for girls and marginalized groups has been achieved compared to their peers. These findings contradict the purposeful (2021) reports that children with disabilities are more likely to be targets of teasing and bullying by their non-disabled peers. This vulnerability to bullying is found in all types of disorders. Therefore, negative attitudes towards peers are a major obstacle to the full social integration of students with disabilities in schools.

Discussions:-

Age of respondents in (Figure 1) reveals that the age distribution of respondents varies widely, ranging from 10 years to over 51 years. This distribution suggests that a significant proportion of respondents are relatively young adults, which can be important when considering their perspectives on particular issues. The results in Figure 2 shows the gender of the respondents. The gender category shows that there are 20 frequencies representing 29% of male respondents and 50 frequencies representing 71% of male respondents. This indicates that more female participants are participating in the study. The researcher included both male and female respondents to obtain the opinions of both men and women about the phenomenon under study. The education level of the respondents is in Figure 3 shows that the education level of the majority of the respondents falls into the secondary education category with the frequency of 30 accounting for (43%) of respondents and the primary education category 10 accounted for (14%) of the respondents, 20 respondents had a university degree (29%), 5 respondents had vocational training (7%), and the number of respondents with qualifications such as diplomas or certificates was 20. This accounted for (7%) of the total, and 5 corresponds to (7%) of the total number of respondents. The result therefore suggests that the majority of respondents have at least a secondary education, which may indicate that the participants have some level of literacy and awareness. Regarding the level of Policy knowledge (Figure 4), result indicates that approximately (57%) of respondents said they were “very familiar” with the national policy on radical inclusion in schools; (14%) said they were “very familiar”. This suggests that a significant proportion of respondents are aware of this policy, which is essential for assessing its effectiveness. Policy Promotion Activities (Figure 5), this data shows that each agency carries out a variety of policy promotion activities. Perspectives of women beneficiaries (Figure 6), the majority of respondents (79%) believe that women beneficiaries of radical inclusion

policies value the policies and believe that they are beneficial to their lives. Removal of policy barriers (Figure 7): A clear majority of respondents (69%) agreed that policy and practical barriers in infrastructure and systems that limit learning for all children have been removed. Overall, this data provides insight into the demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of national policies regarding radical inclusion in schools. This suggests that progress has been made in the awareness and implementation of this policy, which is having a positive impact on women beneficiaries. Social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers has been achieved (Figure 8): The results in Figure 8 show that 25 respondents, or 36% of the respondents, did not agree that social protection for girls and marginalized groups is achieved compared to other groups.

Results showed that half of the respondents agreed that social protection has been achieved for girls and marginalized groups compared to their peers. Concerning the Social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers, half of the respondents agreed that social protection has been achieved for girls and marginalized groups compared to their peers even though negative attitudes toward peers are a major obstacle to the full social integration of students with disabilities in schools.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the National Policy on Radical inclusion in schools for excluded and marginalized children have been effectively carried out as indicated in the results that from the perspectives of women beneficiaries, it is shown that the majority of them believe that women beneficiaries of radical inclusion policies value the policies and that they are beneficial to their lives. Also, it indicates that respondents believe that the policy has had a positive impact on the target group. This means that, according to the respondents, the policy had a positive impact on removing these barriers. Overall, the data provides insight into the demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of national policies regarding radical inclusion in schools. This suggests that progress has been made in the awareness and implementation of this policy, which is having a positive impact on women beneficiaries which is an indication that the governments' objectives have been achieved.

Recommendation:-

The following recommendations have been made based on the results that:

1. The government to promote the awareness raising campaign on the National Policy on Radical inclusion in schools for all children especially the excluded and marginalized children.
2. Government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and civil society institutions undertake activities to advance the national policy on radical inclusion of children especially girls.
3. Government, and all stakeholders to ensure that all infrastructural and systemic policy and practices that limit learning for any child are removed from our institutions and communities.
4. Government, policymakers, and stakeholders in our communities to promote and maintain social protection of girls and the marginalized in comparison with their peers.
5. Government to promote parent and community participation: Involve parents and communities in supporting gender equality in education. Promoting awareness campaigns for parents, encouraging them to challenge traditional gender roles and equally supporting their children's educational aspirations. The involvement of local leaders, community organizations, and civil society groups is also important in promoting gender equality at the grassroots level.
6. Promote the implementation and enforcement of policies: To promote gender equality in education, it is important to facilitate the implementation and enforcement of existing policies, such as Radical inclusion policies in Sierra Leone.
7. Policies must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students, and steps must be taken to ensure compliance.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest

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