

Women Education and Political Participation in the South West Region of Cameroon: An Empirical Analysis

Kinge Ruth Fanny¹ & Adepoju Oluwasanumi A.²

¹ Department of Political Science, Gombe State University, Nigeria

² Department of Education, Gombe State University, Nigeria

Correspondence: Kinge Ruth Fanny, Department of Political Science, Gombe State University, Nigeria. E-mail: rkfanny@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The paper empirically examined the relationship between education level and political participation of women of the South West region of Cameroon. The indices of political participation include the following: membership of political party, voting in elections, occupation of political post, means of occupation of political post and level of occupation of political post. Multistage cluster sampling technique was used to select the sample population of the study. A total of 222 women constituted the sampled population for the study. Data for the study was collected using structured questionnaire. Data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The results revealed that women of the South West region of Cameroon are fairly well exposed to formal education as only 4.1% of the sampled population had no formal education. The study revealed that the higher the level of women's formal education, the more their tendency to participate in politics in areas of voting in elections and occupation of political post either through elections or appointments at all levels of government.

Keywords: women, education, political participation

1. Introduction

In recent times, nations of the world have witnessed increased discussions and debates on gender issues with emphasis on women liberation, emancipation, empowerment, protection of women rights, and women participation in politics among others. In order to ensure women development in modern democracies, governments, world organizations and various stakeholders at different levels have made declarations that are supposed to be binding on member States among which include the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, which prohibit all forms of discriminations based on sex and ensure the right to life, liberty and security (UNDP, 2005).

The 1979 UN Convention on the Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) addressed issues pertaining to the rights of women to education, inheritance, credit and opportunities on equal bases with men. It also reaffirmed the equality of human rights for women and men in societies and in the family. In the same vein, it obliged States to take actions against the social causes of women's inequality; called for the elimination of laws, stereotype practices and prejudices that impair the wellbeing of women (UNDP, 2005). The World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 at Vienna affirmed that "women's rights are human rights" (Delahanty, 2005: 5-10). The Beijing platform of Action in 1999 re-emphasized the protection of women from domestic violence and sexual harassments.

In the wake of all these developments, women in Cameroon are still restricted in almost all important areas of human capabilities. In the South West region of the country, a woman's status is still a reflection of the stereotype cultural views of a woman's role in the society being that of child-raising and home-making. Women are afforded limited opportunities to explore wider aspirations and attaining to her maximum potentials (especially in the socioeconomic and political spheres) outside these cultural stereotype boundaries (UN Women' Watch, 2014). This invariably has resulted in the girl-child being provided little or no opportunities for further education. Thus, women tend to have limited access to formal education as she is often forced into early marriage. (Abua & Fonchong, 2004).

With specific reference to formal education, political participation has been reported to have strong links with education. As an example, Burns, Schlozman and Verba (1997: 373-389) have posited on the basis of decades of

researches into the factors influencing individuals' engagement with politics in the USA, that education is an 'especially powerful predictor of political participation'. They further identified a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation.

Directly impacting on the study is their identification of a range of direct and indirect effects that formal education has upon political participation. Some of these effects they noted include: - the acquisition of knowledge and communication skills useful for public debate, direct trainings in political analysis through courses with current events contents. While in its indirect form, the effect of formal education creates avenues for benefits of voluntary engagement in schools, clubs, sports, and newspapers; these arenas, they concluded provide young people with early apprenticeship politics where they can exercise leadership, develop civic skills of cooperation and negotiation and acquire bureaucratic and organizational skills useful for political activities.

The implication of these results is that education clearly enhances the chances of individuals' participation in politics as it provides necessary skills and knowledge needed for it. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993: 136) argue that education "imparts the knowledge and skills most essential to a citizen's task. As a result of their schooling, the well-educated have the skills people need to understand the abstract subject of politics, to follow the political campaign, and to research and evaluate the issues and candidates".

Although women account for 51% of Cameroon's population yet they occupy 13% of the political and decision making system of the country. For example, only 6.7% of Mayors in Cameroon are females, 13% of the members of parliament are females; and none of the regional governors is a female (Ministry of women affairs, 2010).

This scenario should not be unexpected with the expectation that to marry young constitutes additional barrier to women's pursuits of higher education. Many young girls stop going to school well before their male counterparts, the resultant effects being their engagement in low-paying jobs such as petit trading, a situation which impact tremendously on their public status as well as difficulties in being able to compete against male candidates in elections. Without access to the same level of education, women will continue to have to fight even harder for the same opportunities. This situation is one of the main contributing factors hindering women from participation in politics

(<http://www.asafeworldforwomen.org/womens-rights/wr-africa/w-cameroun/624-women-in-cameroon.html>). This situation is aptly summarized in Table 1. The table revealed that, only 15.8% of Municipal Council Councilors in South West Region of Cameroon are females. This obviously is a pathetic situation far short of the recommended benchmark of 30% at the 1999 Beijing Conference.

Table 1. South west region of Cameroon: Data on municipal councils' councilors between 2007 and 2013

Division	Council	No. of councilors	No. of Women	% of female Councilors
Fako	Buea	41	15	36.6
	Idenau	25	3	12.0
	Limbe I	25	3	12.0
	Limbe II	25	3	12.0
	Limbe III	25	3	12.0
	Muyuka	41	7	17.1
	Tiko	41	9	22.0
	*Limbe City	19	4	21.1
KupeMwanenguba	Bangem	25	3	12.0
	Nguti	25	3	12.0
	Tombel	25	3	12.0
Lebialem	Alou	25	3	12.0
	Menji	25	3	12.0
	Wabane	25	3	12.0
	Akwaya	31	1	3.2
Manyu	Eyumojock	25	3	12.0
	Mamfe	25	5	20.0
	Tinto	25	3	12.0
	Konye	25	3	12.0
Meme	Kumba I	25	5	20.0
	Kumba II	25	3	12.0
	Kumba III	25	3	12.0
	Mbonge	35	6	17.1
	*Kumba City	19	4	21.1
	Bamusso	25	5	20.0
	DikomeBalue	25	3	12.0
Ndian	EkondoTiti	25	4	16.0
	Idabato	25	5	20.0
	Isangele	25	8	32.0
	KumboAbedimo	25	6	24.0
	KumboItindi	25	11	44.0
	Mundemba	25	6	24.0
	Toko	25	5	20.0
Total		877	139	15.8

*City Council derive their councilors from the Sub Divisional Councils

SOURCE: MUDEC GROUP, 2013, BUEA CAMEROON.

This low participation of women in politics in the region is a source for concern as revealed in the Table. This low engagement of women in politics in the south west region of Cameroon is not unconnected with the fact that the level of education of women in the region is low.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of political participation, however, broadly speaking, political participation may be regarded as participating in the political process, such as voting and occupying a political post.

Although voting in elections is a more direct indicator of political participation, getting information on the occupation of political post is a better option of the measurement of political participation. Huntington & Nelson (1976: 3) explained “by political participation we mean activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making.” Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, (1995: 38) informed that political participation refer “simply to activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies”.

The Oxford University Press Online Resource Centre (2014) further informs that there could be both legal and illegal dimensions to political participations, however as regards legal and voluntary political participation; it points out that the general public in a democratic setting may participate in politics in three different ways:

- 1) People can get involved in a public arena to advertise and communicate demands to anyone willing to listen. Example: joining a demonstration.
- 2) People may target policy-makers in legislatures or the executive branch as addressees of their communications. Example: signing a petition.
- 3) People may get involved in the selection process of those who aspire to legislative or executive office. Examples: voting for a party or running for office.

This study thus situates political participation within the context of the following indices: membership of political party; voting in elections; occupation of political post; means of occupation of political post and level of occupation of political post.

To this end, this study was designed to empirically document the educational status of women in the South West Region of Cameroon and to determine the relationship between women education status and their levels of political participation.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) What is the profile of the educational status of women in the South West region of Cameroon?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between women educational attainment and their political participation in the region?

2. Methodology

2.1 Population and Sampling

The population of the study comprises women in the South West Region of Cameroon. In the South West region of Cameroon, there are 6 administrative units. Multistage cluster sampling technique was used to select the sample population for the study. From the 6 administrative units, 3 sub administrative units were randomly selected, from each of the selected 3 sub administrative units, 2 sub units were randomly selected, in all, study sample comprised 6 sub units. From each of the selected 6 sub units, 1 village was randomly selected and from each of the selected 6 villages, 1 main street was selected using simple random sampling. Further 50 households that had women of at least twenty years and above were selected from each of the 6 selected main streets. Through this procedure, a total of 300 women were selected for the study.

2.2 Data Collection Instrument

In order to investigate the impact of education on women’s political participation in the South West region, questionnaire which consisted of two parts was developed by the researchers. . Section A solicited for information on respondents’ educational level. Section B requested for information as regards respondents’ extents of involvements in the following pre-specified indices of political participation: membership in political party; voting in elections; occupation of political post; means and levels of occupation of political post. A total of 222 (74% of administered questionnaires) were returned.

2.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected for the study, a combination of inferential and descriptive statistical techniques were used. These were presented in the form of frequency distribution table and simple percentages.

3. Results, Discussion and Conclusion

3.1 South West Region of Cameroon Female Educational Level Profile:

As regards the educational background of the respondents, the results are summarized in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2. South west region of Cameroon female educational level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
No formal Education	9	4.1
First School Leaving Certificate	42	18.9
G.C.E. O Level	69	31.1
G.C.E. A Level	48	21.6
University Degree and above	63	28.4
Total	222	100.0

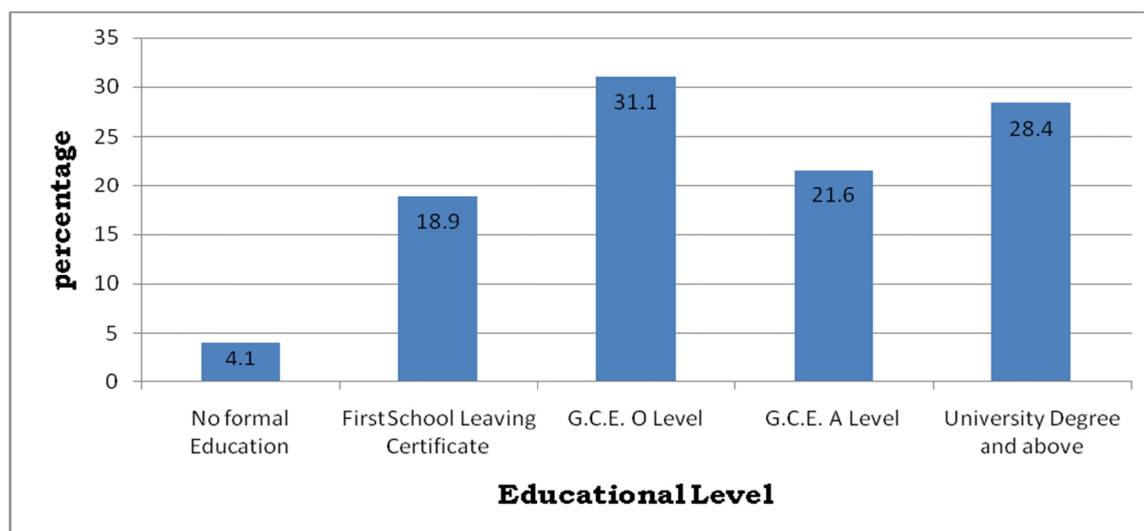


Figure 1. Chart indicating the distributions of women of the south west region of Cameroon by educational level

The results indicate that only about 4.1% of the respondents have no formal education. This result tends to be consistent with the estimated 90% literacy rate for the region (UNDP, 2014). The results further indicate that at least 50% of women in South West Cameroon had a secondary school education. The educational level that has the highest proportions of respondents is the GCE ordinary level which is the results possessed by 31.1% of the respondents and as much as 28.4% had at least a university degree. These thus indicate that the women of the South West region of Cameroon are fairly well exposed to formal education.

3.2 South West Region of Cameroon Women's Political Participation Based on Their Educational Level

With regards to the relationship between participation of women of the south west region of Cameroon and their educational level, the results are summarized in Table 3

Table 3. South west region of Cameroon women's political participation based on the educational level

SN	Index of political participation	Level	Responses					TOTAL	X ² P-value	Remark
			NIL	FSLC	OL	AL	DEGREE			
1	Registered Membership of Political Party	A member	3	15	18	18	24	78(35.1)	0.32	NS
		Not a member	6	27	51	30	30	144(64.9)		
2	Voting in Last Elections	Voted	3	12	24	18	36	93(41.9)	0.04	SIG
		Did not Vote	6	21	45	30	27	129(58.1)		
3	Occupation of Political Post	Political Post Occupied	0	5	7	12	15	39(17.6)	0.23	NS
		Political Post not Occupied	9	21	57	42	54	183(82.4)		
4	Means of Occupation of Political post	Through Elections	0	3	3	6	6	18(8.1)	Computation not possible	At least an expected value = 0
		Through Appointments	0	2	4	6	9	21(9.5)		
5	Level of Occupation Political Post	National	0	0	0	1	3	4(1.8)	Computation not possible	At least an expected value = 0
		Regional	0	0	1	1	2	4(1.8)		
		Divisional	0	0	0	3	4	7(3.2)		
		Sub-Divisional	0	3	6	6	9	24(10.8)		

Source: Fieldwork survey Dec 2011-January 2012 (Percentages of respondents in Parentheses)

These results are likewise pictorially indicated in Figures 2 to 7.

1) South West Region of Cameroon women's political participation and membership of political parties across their educational levels.

Figure 2 gives a summary of the results.

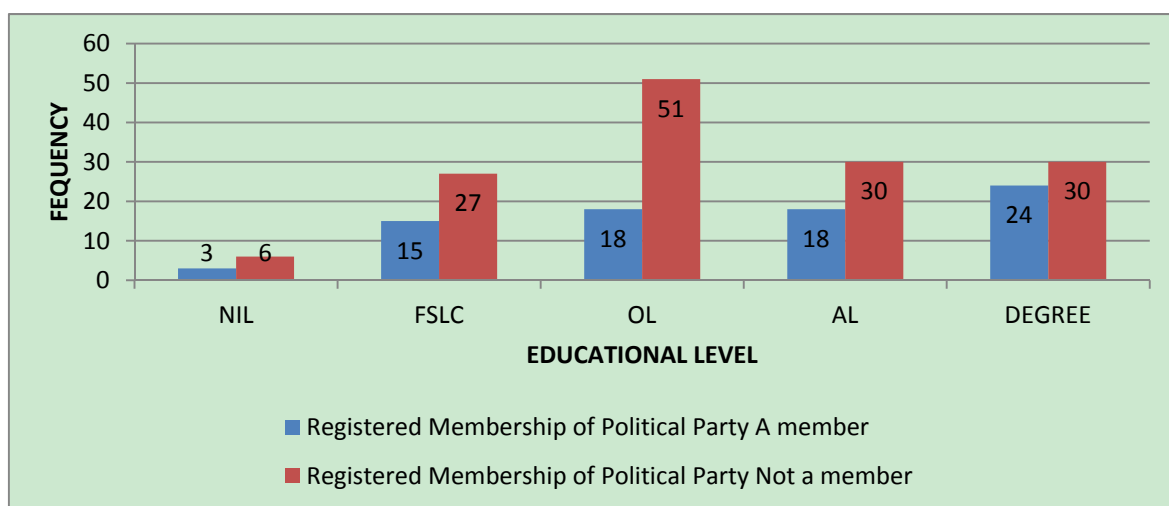


Figure 2. Chart indicating the distributions of women of the south west region of Cameroon by membership of political party across educational level

From the Table 3 and Figure 2, 78 (35.1%) women agreed that they are registered members of various political parties with 15 who are holders of FSLC, 18 are holders of GCE O Level, and 24 had at least university graduates. The X^2 yielded a p-value of 0.32 indicating no significant statistical relationship between women's membership of political parties and their educational level at the 0.05 level of significance. It could thus be asserted that although no statistical difference existed in political participation based on education, it could be observed that the proportion of participation tends to increase with educational level.

2) South West Region of Cameroon women's political participation and voting in elections across their educational Levels:

The results are pictorially presented in Figure 3.

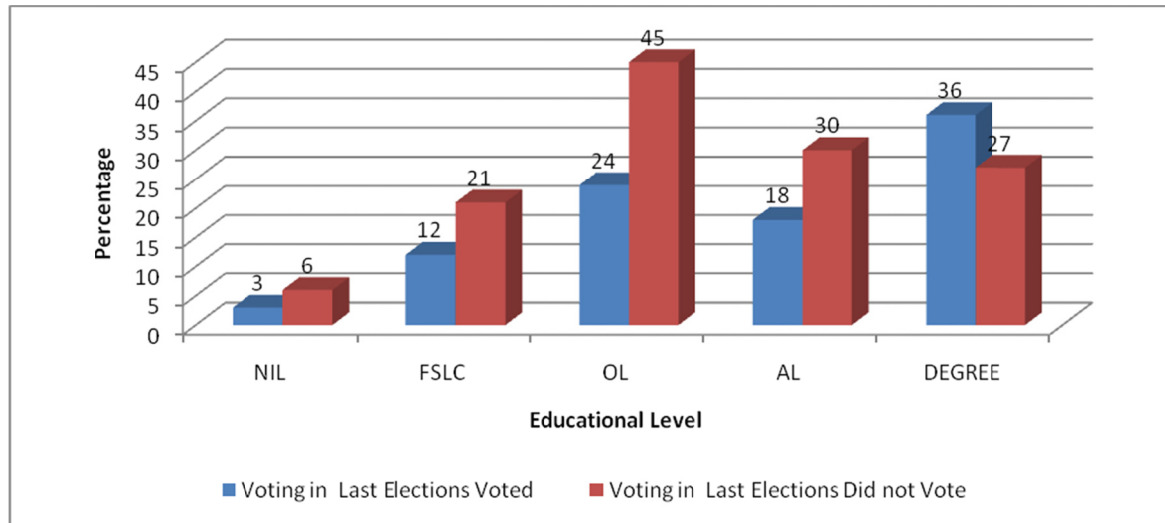


Figure 3. Chart indicating the distributions of women of the south west region of Cameroon and voting in elections by educational level

From the Figure 3 and Table 3, it could be observed that women who voted during the last elections in the region increases as their educational level increases and that although the proportion of those that did not vote was consistently higher than those that voted among women in each of the educational levels, the reverse however was observed for those with at least a university degree. The X^2 test yielded a p-value of 0.04 indicating that a significant statistical relationship exists between voting in elections and women's educational level at 0.05 level of significance. It could thus be inferred that as regards voting in elections, women's level of education tends to be a high contributing factor. This is especially more so as regards women with at least a degree as this group of women tend to have higher members that participated in politics through voting than those that did not participate in politics through voting.

3) South West region of Cameroon Women's political participation based on their occupation of political post across their educational levels:

Figure 4 gives a pictorial summary of the results with regards to occupation of political posts as an index of political participation.

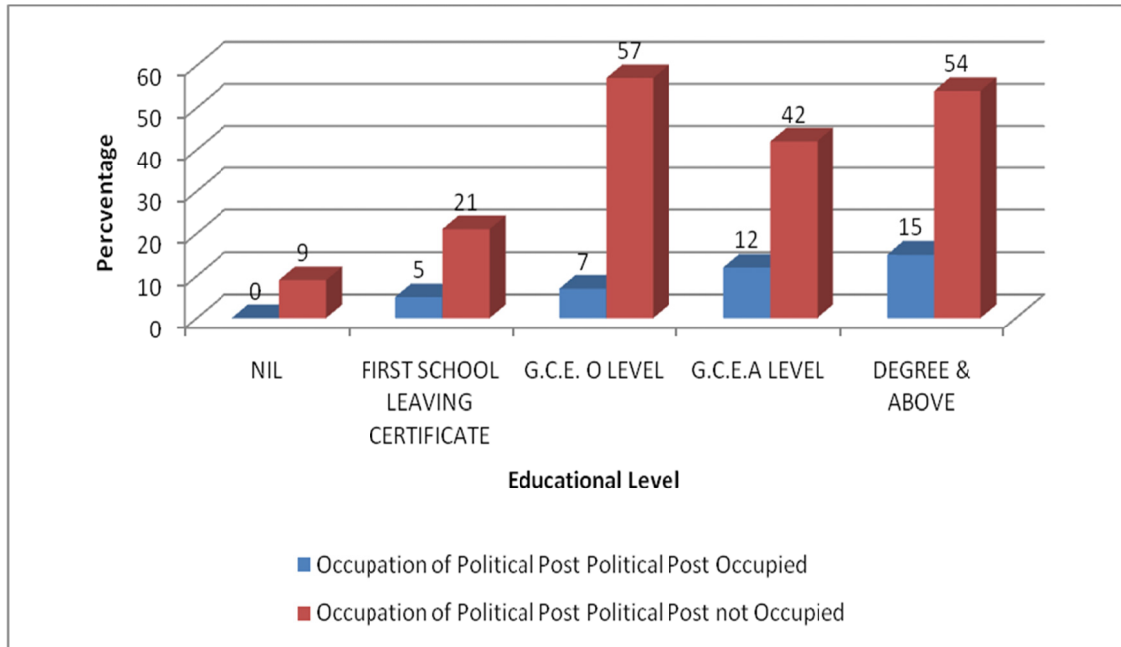


Figure 4. Chart indicating the distributions of women of the south west Cameroon and occupation of political post by educational level

Table 3 revealed that 39 (17.6%) women occupied political post in the region across the various levels of educational attainment and that as their educational level increased, the proportion of women who occupied political post also increased. It thus seems that women’s political participation with regards to occupation of political post tend to linearly vary with women’s level of formal education. The X^2 yielded a p-value of 0.27 which however indicates no significant statistical relationship between the occupation of political posts and women’s educational level at 0.05 level of significance.

4) South West region of Cameroon women’s political participation based on their means of occupation of political post across their educational levels:

With regards to means of occupation of political post, the results are pictorially presented in Figure 5.

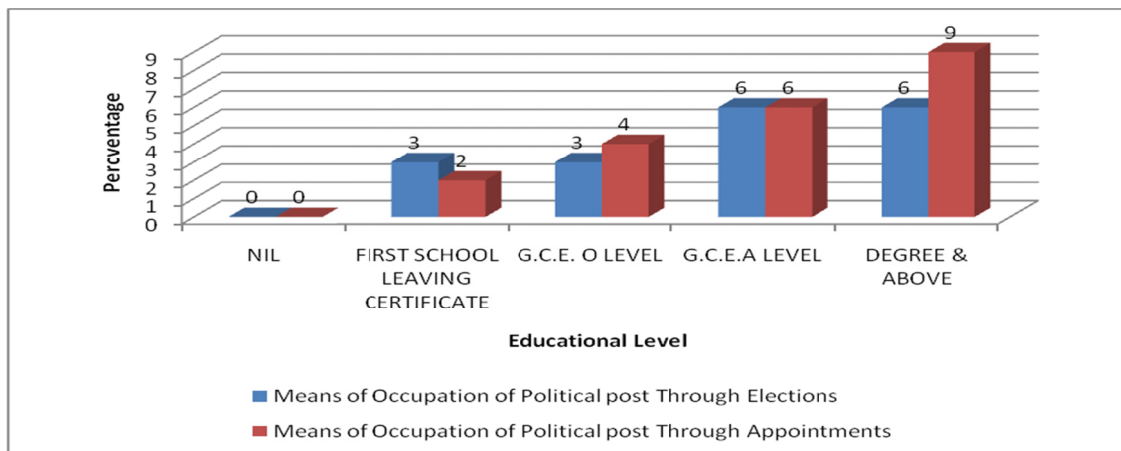


Figure 5. Chart indicating the distributions of females of south west region of Cameroon means of occupation of political post by educational level

Table 3 and Figure 5 show that 18 (8.1%) women occupied political posts through elections while 21(9.5%) got political posts by appointments. These results further showed that women with higher educational levels occupied political posts via both elections and appointments.

5) South West Region of Cameroon women’s political participation based on their Level of Occupation of Political Post across their educational Level:

Level of Occupation of Political Post

With regards to the level of occupation of political post, the results are pictorially presented in Figure 6.

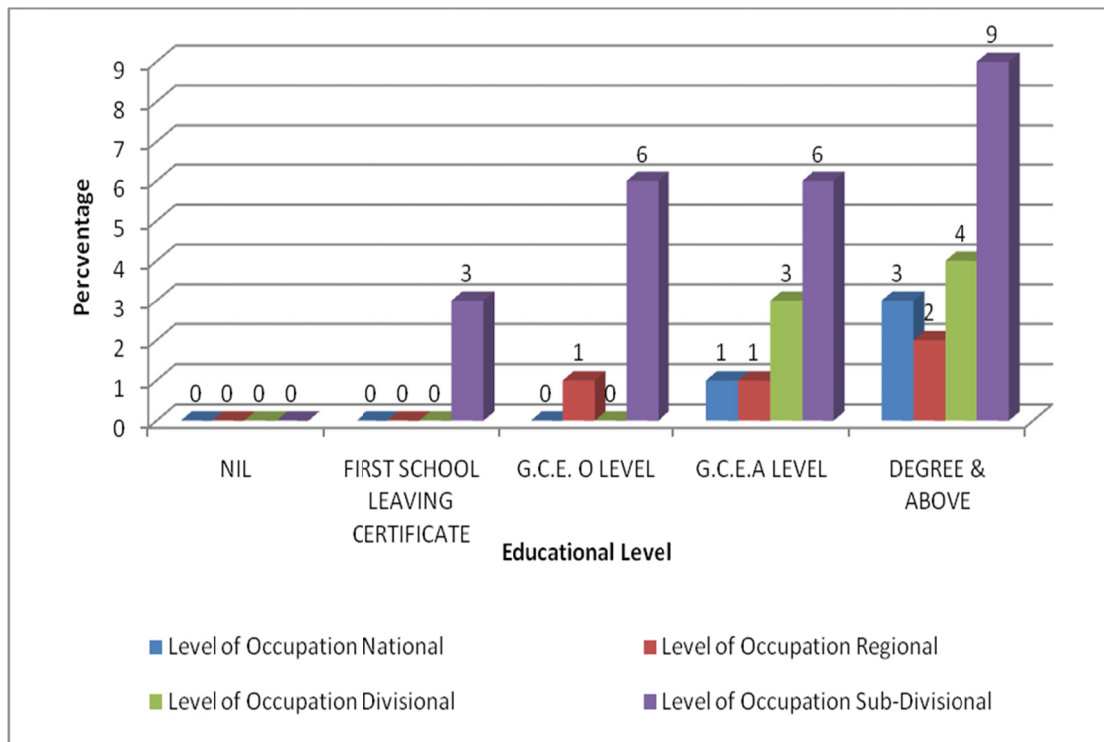


Figure 6. Chart indicating the distributions of females of south west region of Cameroon level of education by educational level

The Table 3 and figure 6 portrays that across the different educational levels, 4 women (1.8%) *women* occupied political post at the national level, 4 (1.8%) at the regional level, 7 (3.2%) at the divisional level and 24 (10.8%) at the sub divisional level. A further look at the data showed that as educational level increased, women’s occupation of political post across various levels of government increased.

4. Discussions

The study examined the impact of women’s educational level and political participation. The results have portrayed that the levels of formal education of women in South west region of Cameroon affect their levels of political participation. The results of this study are supported by the works of Dee (2004: 1697–1720) who maintained that educational attainment itself has a large and significant impact on levels of political participation. In the same vein, Milligan, Moretti, and Oreopoulos, (2003: 1667-95) argued that education connotes sophistication and thus have influence on the nature or quality of participation just as well as in its outcomes. While Sondheimer and Green (2010: 174-189) informed that educational attainment exogenously induced changes in human beings and this ensures high level of political participation in terms of higher voters’ turnout, membership in political parties, attending political rallies and campaigns and occupation of political posts among others. Similarly, Milbrath and Goel (1977) asserted that educational attainment and higher participation are positively correlated as they argued that greater awareness of government activities, more advanced opinions, and greater confidence in one’s ability to influence government result from higher education.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings of this study, it is possible to conclude that the women of the South West region of Cameroon are fairly well exposed to formal education. The study further showed that the higher the educational level of women, the higher their level of political participation especially in areas of voting in elections and occupation of political post either through elections or appointments across all levels of government.

The findings of this study indicate high level of association between women's level of formal education and participation in political, the study thus recommends the encouragement of formal adult education for women in South West region of Cameroon to acquire at least a university degree. Several means to attain this could be explored which may include increasing access to higher education for women, providing assistance in forms of loans and grants to women to acquire higher education.

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