

**GENDER INEQUALITY AND GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION ENROLMENT INTO FORMAL
SCHOOLING: A SITUATION ANALYSIS IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The paper was extracted from an institutional based research report on gender sensitive situation analysis on gender and girl-child access to education in Sokoto State. The paper assessed Gender Inequality and Girl-child Education Enrolment into formal schooling in Sokoto State. Gender inequality rooted in the preferential treatment and enrolment of males over females was visibly observed and established in Sokoto State. The causes of such inequality were found to be varied and are classified into socio-cultural, economic, and institutional. The study provided answer on the causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State. The study employed a mixed research methodology using quantitative and qualitative methods in generating data for the study. 1,283 Questionnaires were distributed to relevant stakeholders while 12 In-depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews were conducted with officials of the Agency for Female Education, and the Ministry of Education as well as with the officials of the selected schools and Focus Group Discussions conducted with female adolescents. A purposive sampling procedure was adopted in the selection of respondents. Qualitative findings from the study were analyzed thematically while the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Based on the findings, the study discovered that certain socio-cultural factors hinder female education which includes culture, religious misinterpretations, preference for early marriage and the perceived outcome of the educational and economic labor force as it relates to the employment vacuum created. The study recommended huge financial support to females who complete tertiary education while getting married.

Keywords: Education, Enrollment, Formal School, Gender, Girl-Child, Inequality

Introduction

Education to the human race is considered bedrock for human capital and social development, this nictitates the importance of education to all gender irrespective of socio-cultural milieu. It is often said that to educate a single girl child is to educate the whole world. However, most parents do not apply this principle in the Islamic north-western part of the country, and in the Hausas. Inequality rendered on the female child originates from long-standing socio-cultural gender inequality, where the male child is considered the family breadwinner, thus he had to be educated to the highest levels, while the female child is considered men's property to be possessed and dispossessed at will, so educating the girl-child is considered only benevolent to her future family.

Education for the girl child especially formal education has become a matter of concern to stakeholders in Nigeria as a result of the inequality and deprivation leveled against the girl-child due to the notion and perception that women are weak, thus leading to a low level of formal education necessary for the attainment of self-actualization. The inequality and deprivation vary from one region of the country to another and is more prevalent in northern Nigeria in general and Northwestern Nigeria in particular and is deepened and accentuated by parents as they exert

Influence on the education of their wards, especially the girl child (Mohammed and Dauda, 2022).

In Nigeria, the entrenched patriarchal social system translates into male domination and subordination of women in both private and public spheres, the result of which is construction and perpetuation of gender inequality. Women/girls are seen to be more vulnerable to poverty, cultural and societal vices. Empirical evidences show gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion at all levels- primary, secondary, and tertiary. In 15 northern states, the disparity in favor of boys is quite high. Women education is a road to gender equality and social justice; it is a key to gender equity, justice, improved skills and technological knowledge acquisition, improved nutrition, reproductive health, and economic empowerment (Federal Ministry of Education, 2006).

Various policies had been enacted by the Nigerian government to mitigate the wild spread inequality in gender enrollment into basic schooling, Despite Nigerian government's initiatives such as Northern Education Initiative (NEI), Girl Education Project (GEP) and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in bridging the massive educational gap between males and females in Sokoto state it remains one of the states with high illiteracy level due to cultural and socio-economic status factors affecting female education. (Ibrahim, Khan and Ramli, 2020).

As a guiding principle towards achieving and attaining gender equality towards girl-child education in Nigeria, various policies had been enacted by different and concerned stakeholders as it relates to ensuring gender equity in educating boys and girls but certain factors served as a constraint to this policies. Several factors combined to affect the development of children and women particularly girl-child in less developed countries. Economic hardship prevents parents from giving their children the requisite childhood support for proper development. On the other hand, culture and beliefs are also at play which encourages child marriage that interferes with the educational pursuit of girl-child in school. Children, both males, and females need moral, social, and economic as well as psychological support to be fully integrated into society, especially during the early socialization process.

Sokoto State is one of the states in Northern Nigeria with poor records of human development and women and children receive the brunt of the problems. The selection of Sokoto for the situation analysis revealed factors that hinder the full realization of rights and lifetime opportunities by vulnerable groups i.e. women and children. The State's low rate of girl-child enrollment into primary school and inclusion of females into the mainstream development process of society was due to factors itemized above. Growing gender disparity in public affairs and the number of out-of-school children in the state constitute a grave threat to the development of children,

particularly the girl-child. The consequences of the exclusion of girl-child from obtaining formal education led to the present multifaceted problems faced by the children and women.

Furthermore, the human development index reports Sokoto State is among the poorest State in Nigeria. This translates into poverty in the family which implies that they would not be able to cater to the daily expenses of a girl. The prevalence of poverty which has a direct and positive relationship with socioeconomic woes prevents parents from realizing their potential.

Statement of the Research Problem

Education, the world over, is considered to be one of the most important driving forces of economic and social development. According to Olabisi (2016), education at all levels promotes health, improves the quality of life, expands access to paid employment, increases productivity, and facilitates social and political participation for men and women. Education is the right of every girl everywhere and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country, and their world. Moreover, women's education is a key to gender equity, justice, and poverty reduction, as well as the socio-economic development of nations (Olabisi, 2016). However, the common reality is that even though women constitute about half of the population of the world, they are not given equal access to education with men in many parts of the world.

In Nigeria, although significant progress could be said to have been achieved in closing the gender gap in access to education in many parts of the country, the progress could be said to be visible only at the primary and secondary levels of education. At the tertiary educational level, a huge inequality still exists between males and females. Several studies have documented the glaring gender inequalities that characterize access and participation in higher education (Oanda and Akudolu, 2010; Akanbi, 2012; Olabisi, 2016). Most of these studies show that female enrollments and participation in higher education are less than 40 percent of the total number of students in higher institutions.

According to Oanda and Akudolu (2010) successful international campaigns for gender equity in education and social development coupled with the adoption of gender-responsive policies at national levels have contributed to this increasing trend in enrollments. The percentage of female students accessing and participating in primary and secondary levels of education is increasing. The progress achieved in primary and secondary education is expected to influence increased access and enrollment of women in higher education. Of concern, however, is that increased access and participation of female students at the primary school level is not necessarily translating to higher enrollments at secondary and higher education levels.

Thus, Nigeria records high female enrollment and participation rates in primary and secondary education, but high attrition rates in transition to a higher level of education. For instance, data for the overall tertiary education sector for Nigeria was 41 percent by 2006, however, female students comprised 31.2 percent of the students enrolled in 23 federal universities (Oanda, and Akudolu, (2010). Furthermore, in Nigeria, access to higher education depends on a candidate's performance in the competitive examinations organized by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Female enrollments in Nigeria universities for 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 academic sessions stood at 35 percent, 38 percent, 38 percent, 32 percent, and 36 percent respectively (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007).

The obstacle to the realization of the potentialities of girl-child and women is the longstanding belief against women in the State. Islamic religious beliefs mixed with traditions have combined to militate against the penetration of glass-ceiling in predominantly Hausa communities like Sokoto State. Effects of such erroneous beliefs have produced religious fanatics who are anti-western education in the State. Another challenge is

accessing the girl-child for the situation analysis due to cultural beliefs which prohibit adult men to interact with the opposite sex without the permission of the parents, guardian, or husband of the woman. Similarly, it would be extremely difficult to debunk the notion held about early marriage and western education for women in a society known for cultural and religious dogmatism.

However, the challenges are not insurmountable, collaborative efforts through roundtable discussion with invited scholars and experts from civil society organizations could debunk the notion held by some focal persons in the communities. During the discussion, side effects of gendered discrimination and some cultural practices which stunt the growth and development of children and women would be discouraged hence an increase in the enrollment rate. Similarly, government and other donor agencies would be mobilized to provide incentives to encourage the enrollment of girl-child into formal schools. Also, the inclusion of women in public affairs would motivate parents to encourage their female children that they have a future if they possess the requisite skills and knowledge.

Various attempts were put in place to ensure gender equality at all levels of education. However, a review of the Nigerian situation found that gender inequality in access to education is still very prevalent in Nigeria. Although several studies on gender inequality in education were carried out in Nigeria, much focus appears to be on the inequality in access to basic and secondary education only. Thus, there is not much attention by scholars on inequalities at all levels of education. Furthermore, the few studies that focused on gender inequality in education in Nigeria, most of them were conducted in southern Nigeria, thus, little focus was given to the northern parts of the country. Given this, therefore, this study intends to study the pattern of gender inequality in educational enrollment, with specific reference to girl-child access education in Sokoto State. The study thus aims to reveal some important and silent issues on gender inequality in educational enrollment which were yet to be fully explored and articulated in northern Nigeria in general and Sokoto State in particular. The paper seeks to provide answer to the question on what are the causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State. The broad aim of this research is to examine gender disparity in high educational enrollment in some selected higher educational institutions in Sokoto State. The specific objective of the study is to identify the causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State

Literature Review

There is a natural gender role distinction all over the world, a reality that has created a gap in opportunities between men and women. The gap in those opportunities between men and women is what constituted what is generally regarded as gender inequality. The gender gap, is, thus the unfulfilled space between the male and female in various endeavors, including education. In the world, there is an almost equal number of males and females, however, there are no equal opportunities for the two genders in many developmental affairs in the world, with women, in most cases being marginalized. Master web Daily Newspaper (2002) reports that:

Women are more than fifty percent of the world's population. They perform two-thirds of the world's work, yet receive one-tenth of the world's income and own one-hundredth of the world's property. They represent a staggering seventy percent of the world's one billion poorest people.

Another area, in which gender inequality became more severe and which has severe consequences for societies is the gender inequality in access to education. Education is an instrument for national development and an asset to any nation. It is a vehicle for developing skills and competencies and imparting knowledge and learning. Without education, various socio-economic activities in the societies will remain stagnant and the human society will continue to wallow in ignorance. According to Otiye-Igbuzor, (2006), the relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented

that schooling improves productivity and health and reduces negative features of life such as child labor as well as bringing about empowerment (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002).

This is why there has been a lot of emphasis on all citizens of the world having access to education, leading to further recognition of education as one of the basic human rights in 1948, following the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Since then, many other international instruments and human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), among others have reaffirmed the right to education and have supported entitlement to education for all children (Ugwulebo, 2011; Akudolu and Eyiuche, 2015).

However, it has been documented that there are high levels of high educational deprivation for both children and adults across the globe (Subrahmanian, 2002), but more serious in developing countries (UNICEF, 2007). This lack of access to education is more intense in the female gender, thus, leading to a very wide inequality in educational access between the male and the female gender. According to UNICEF (2007), the global figure for children without education is estimated at 121 million and out of this figure 65 million were girls. Over 80 percent of these girls live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the World Bank report of 2011 states that almost half of the world's elementary school-aged girls that are not in school live in Sub-Saharan Africa; around a quarter lives in South Asia (World Bank, 2011). Lack of access to secondary school and tertiary education is also high across the globe but also more severe in developing countries of the world (UNESCO, 2011).

Dating back as far as 2006, the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education unraveled that In Nigeria overall, girls have lower enrolment rates than boys in the formal basic education system. This scenario is much more serious in the Northern states. On the other hand, some girls enroll in a wide network of non-formal Islamic education centers in urban and rural settings, where girls' enrolments are sometimes relatively higher than those boys', (e.g. Islamiya schools in Kano, Borno and Sokoto). This is why the policy recommended that the Non-Formal Sector must be further encouraged as an alternative delivery mode to obtain quality Education For All (EFA) by 2015 and gender equality as soon as possible. Even though this policy meant to ensure that by 2015, the EFA policy is effectively and efficiently achieved especially in the most entrenched states of Borno, Kano and Sokoto, Sokoto state still remains among top priority states where gender inequality vested on the girl-child in terms of basic education and post secondary education is still prevalent.

Factors identified as being responsible for gender inequality in access to education are varied. According to Makuro (2014), such factors include endemic poverty, schooling cost, the burden of household labor, shortage of school facilities, negative and even dangerous school environment, and cultural and social practices that discriminate against girls including early marriage and restriction on female mobility and limited employment opportunities for women.

For more than a decade ago, the aforementioned factors were captured the Federal Ministry of Education in the 2006 National Policy on Gender in Basic Education, and were considered hindering factors to equitable access to basic education by gender, notable among these factors include; girl-unfriendly school infrastructure, skewed female-male teacher ratios, gender biased attitudes against girls, sexual harassment of girls, poverty, cultural factors and erroneous interpretation of religious teaching.

Gender disparity in access to education has a lot of negative impacts on society and eliminating such inequality in access to education has been considered a critical factor in the development of every society. According to the World Bank, as cited by Ganguli, et al, (2011) there is no investment more effective for achieving development goals than educating girls. Similarly, the 2012 World Development Report focuses on gender and development and states explicitly that gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. According to the Report, (World Bank, 2012), gender equality enhances the productivity of the current generation and improves development outcomes for the next. One of the main mechanisms of development that arises from gender equality is the improvement in education that moves hand in hand with gender equality. Thus, Glewwe

and Kremer (2006) argue that most economists and international development agencies believe that girls who receive education not only improve their vocational opportunities, living conditions, and social status but also promote economic growth and the social development of the entire nation.

Various attempts, both at global and national levels were made over the years to deal with the gender discrimination against females in access to education. Olabisi (2016) listed those global efforts to include, among others, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, World Conferences on Women, the 1979 UN General Assembly landmark Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UNIFEM (now called UN Women) the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, MDG3 The Beijing Platform of Action (BPoA) and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Dubai 2013 British Council's Going Global Conference. Others include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 1990 World Conference on Education For All (EFA), in Jomtien, Thailand, and more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Nigeria also recognizes education as a fundamental human right and is a signatory to the major conventions and international instruments for the elimination of gender inequality in education. Furthermore, Nigeria has come up with various programs that aim to remove all barriers to access to education for all Nigerians in general and the female gender, in particular. Such attempts include the introduction of Education for All, Universal Primary Education, Universal Basic Education, and various scholarship programs.

In Sokoto State, various attempts were also made to ensure access to education for all in the state. For instance, there is a free feeding program at both primary and secondary schools in the state. The government has also come up with a scholarship program for the indigenes of the state that are in tertiary institutions. More recently, the government has introduced a program for the payment of tuition and registration fees for the indigenes in the state that are in various tertiary institutions within and outside Nigeria. The government has also established the Agency for Female Education. All these attempts were made to ensure that access to education has been given to all citizens and gender disparity at all levels of education are eliminated.

However, a global analysis, as well as country-specific analysis, has indicated that although significant progress has been made to close gender inequality in access to education, such progress could only be said to be witnessed at primary and secondary levels. According to Horowitz and Wille (2010), gender equality has been reached in primary and, to some extent, secondary schooling in many parts of the world. In Nigeria, girls' access to education, especially in northern states, has remained low. As few as 20 percent of women in the North West and North East of the country are literate and have attended school. In the Northern part of the country, the number of children out of school is particularly high and the proportion of girls to boys in school ranges from 1 girl to 2 boys and even 1 to 3 in some states.

In the neighbouring Kebbi State, Mohammed and Dauda (2022) in a study of parental attitudes towards girl-child enrollment into formal schooling in Kuka district established that parents do not willingly enroll their wards (male and female) into formal schooling, the parents had to be compelled by the headmasters in such district to enroll their wards into primary schools, in the event of such, parents were usually preferential in enrolling the male child over the female child. In a similar developments, the authors discovered that commitment had to be signed by the parents in the presence of policemen and judicial staff, that female child enrolled will not be withdrawn until the girl-child completes 9 years of non-stop compulsory education as parents usually withdraw and replace female child with another male child once timing for marriage of the female child sets-in. It is based on the aforementioned findings that the author discovered the practice of "child replacement" where female child ripe for marriage will be replaced with a younger child so as to allow for free withdrawal and marriage of the girl-child without obstruction from the teachers and headmaster or principal.

Mohammed, Horo, Muhammad and Ibrahim (2019) assessed Factors Influencing Parental Attitudes towards Girl- Child Education in Sokoto South Local Government Area, Sokoto State, Nigeria, Findings from the study revealed that parents have the belief that “girl child education is corrupting the female children” and the belief that “the way modern schools operate is not consistent with Islamic religion” was the major religious belief preventing parents from sending their girls to school. Furthermore, the authors unraveled that the mix of opposite sex in schools further accentuates the backdrop in girls’ enrolment into formal schooling; this is with a clear notion on the belief by parents that immorality can easily be learned in schools by the female child. This why majority of the parents in Sokoto South LGA still have the belief that western education was brought to contradict and prevent people from following Islamic doctrines. Based on this, majority of the parents prefer to send their boys to school.

The above findings is similar to the findings by Ibrahim, Sarkingobir, Sahabi, Salihu and Salami (2021) where several factors were identified to hinder girl-child access to formal education, these factors include; perception of parents that girl-child education is against their religion and culture; poverty; parents' lack of western education; co-education; hawking amongst girls; early marriage; the demand for girls' labour at home and lack of schools' infrastructure. This is clear indication that these factors had been a long standing and entrenched factor hindering girl-child education thus perpetuating gender inequality leveled against the girl-child for more than a decade in the state.

Findings from the review conclude that enrolment rates for girls in Sokoto state are still low thereby hindering the attainment of parity between boys and girls. This is attributed to, among others, the economic conditions, distrust of western education by some northern communities (whereby financial spending on boy-child education is prioritized over that of girl-child coupled with the perception in some quarters that western education leads to immorality and likelihood of unwanted pregnancy) and early marriage and other gender-related discriminatory cultural practices and inhibitions like inadequacy or absence of qualified female teachers to serve as role models to motivate girls to stay in school.

This study is therefore aimed at the causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Noting the place of first-hand information in ascertaining the degree of relationships between variables and coupled with the nature of the problem studied, the research design adopted for the study was a household survey in the selected Local Government Areas of Sokoto State from December 2019- June 2020. This involved information generated from a portion of the population that served as a representative of the entire population. In addition, it involved methodological triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative alternatives. This is to provide a more holistic perspective in respect of the variables studied.

The data was collected from as wide a variety of levels as possible. Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) were carried out with officials of the Agency for Women Education, the Ministry of Education, and officials of the selected schools. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with traditional and religious leaders in the area. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) sessions were held with female adolescents from the selected local government areas. This was to verify claims made by the officials on the issue under study. Also, questionnaires were administered to the sampled respondents in the study area.

Both qualitative and quantitative surveys were carried out in a representative sampling of the study area and data was elicited with regards to the socio-economic situation in the study area; girl-child enrolment situations in western education and perception of people about girl-child education in the study area. In addition, additional

information was sought from heads of schools and other stakeholders of the communities selected for the study. Meetings with various associations such as the Religious organizations, Women Economic Empowerment Organization, and other interested parties were organized in January 2020 to wrap up the research. The study also disseminated a preliminary report of the research findings to all the stakeholders. In sum, some Key Informant Interviews and In-Depth Interviews were conducted during the survey to complement the quantitative data.

Population of the study

The study targets all the 23 local government areas of Sokoto state. The National Population Commission (2006) puts the population of Sokoto state at 3,702,676. However, using the Geometric growth rate approach at a 3% annual growth rate, the projected population of Sokoto state as of 2019 is 5,524,100. The target population includes parents, school teachers, government officials, and traditional and religious leaders.

Sample Size

Going by the projected population of the study area, it was difficult for the entire population to be subject to the study. Therefore, the sample size of the study was 1,379. With a population of 5,524,100 sizes, a margin error of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and the assumption that the response distribution of each question is 50%, the recommended sample size of the survey based on the total population of the selected village areas were 1,379 using the sample size calculator published in 2004 by Raosoft Inc. The sample size of each village area was determined by its population percentage. A total of six local government areas were selected from the state.

Table 1: Distribution of questionnaires

S/N	Local Government Area	Number of Wards	Number of Questionnaires
1.	Sokoto North	12	216
2.	Binji	11	213
3.	Gwadabawa	12	214
4	Gudu	12	214
5	Tureta	11	213
6	Bodinga	12	214
TOTAL			1,283

In all, a total number of 1,379 respondents were sampled to represent the study population where questionnaires were administered to a total number of 1,283 across the six selected local government areas of the state.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents for KIIs and IDIs

Proposed Key informant interviews and In-Depth Interviews with religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, and heads of schools			Proposed Focus Group Discussion with Female Adolescents	
Category of Respondents	Number of Respondents	Number of Interviews	Local Government Areas	Number of Participants
Religious Leaders	3	3	Sokoto North	12
Traditional Leaders	3	3	Binji	12
Officials of Min. of Education	3	3	Gwadabawa	12
Officials of Agency for Women Education	3	3	Gudu	12
Heads of Schools/Teachers	12	12	Tureta	12
Total	24	24	Bodinga	12
			Total	72

To elicit complementary detailed information i.e. KIIs and IDIs in each local government area were held for four different categories of people namely: religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, and Heads of schools/teachers. While FGDs were conducted with female groups and the size of the group was 6 to 12 participants in each session. The size enhanced effective participation by all members of the group. The responses to issues raised were tape-recorded and thereafter professionally transcribed and qualitatively analyzed. Similarly, the data was integrated into the main quantitative data.

The target population for the administration of the questionnaires was both adult and youth members of the community. The questionnaires were personally administered by the members of the research team.

Sampling Techniques and Procedures

The cluster sampling technique was employed in the selection of the sample. The state was first divided into three (3) clusters from which two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly sampled, making a total of six (6) LGAs. The LGAs were further divided into clusters according to their number of Wards from which three (3) wards were randomly selected. Subsequently, individual respondents whose questionnaire was administered were randomly selected through their residences or households. For qualitative data collection, on arrival at each selected setting, the principal researcher introduced the team to the traditional ruler who then assembled the required number and categories of respondents for interviews (KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs). This was made possible because a letter of introduction was sent to all village and District Heads ahead of the visit in advance. This technique was adopted in response to the residential pattern of the villages (scattered), rules and regulations for gaining entrance, and the respect that traditional rulers command in such homogeneous societies.

Methods of Data Collection

As said earlier, the questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection, which was administered personally by the research team as well as conducting Key Informant Interviews (KII), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Instruments of Data Collection

A well-structured questionnaire was administered as the main instrument of data collection containing relevant questions on the study variables. The questions were open and close-ended with fixed alternatives for the close-ended questions and open-ended questions which allowed the respondents to freely express their views. Before the administration of the questionnaires, the District Heads of the selected areas were informed and the purpose of the study was duly explained to them. Apart from the questionnaire, which was the main instrument of data collection, interviews and focus group interview guides were designed to elicit complementary information.

Methods of Data Analysis

The triangulation method was employed in the analysis of the data obtained. The quantitative data were subjected to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) computer software. Univariate and multivariate analyses were used in the analysis. The univariate analysis summarized the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents into percentages, whereas the multivariate analysis examined the cross-tabulation of variables to ascertain relationships between them. Tables and charts were used for pictorial representation of the data. On the other hand, the qualitative data were subjected to qualitative analysis through content analysis which brought out the thematic views of the participants through verbatim quotations. Triangulation was used in the analysis of data obtained where both the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Below is the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data and a discussion of the major findings that follow forthwith. However, a total of 1,283 questionnaire was administered to the sampled respondents but the researchers were able to retrieved and analyses a total of 1,119 as the remaining questionnaires could not be retrieved and some were poorly responded to, which made it impossible for the responses to be analysed. Therefore, the data interpretation and analysis were based on the retrieved and appropriately responded questionnaires.

Table 3: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents I

Variable	Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Sex Distribution of Respondents	Male	243	21.7
	Female	876	78.3
	Total	1119	100.0
Age Distribution of Respondents	Age	Frequency	Percentage
	10-20 Years	354	31.6
	21-30 Years	696	62.2
	31-40 Years	54	4.8
	41-50 Years	12	1.1
	Above 50 Years	3	.3
	Total	1119	100.0
Respondent's Religion Affiliation	Religion	Frequency	Percentage
	Islam	1062	94.9
	Christianity	54	4.8
	Traditional Religion	3	.3
	Total	1119	100.0
Respondent's Education Qualification	Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
	Qur'anic	54	4.8
	Primary	45	4.0
	Secondary	408	36.5
	Tertiary	609	54.4
	Others (Specify)...	3	.3
	Total	1119	100.0

On the sex distribution of the respondents, most of the respondents (78.3 percent) were females. This is unconnected to the study in view as the female population is vulnerable to gender inequality in terms of access to education and had prior knowledge of why inequality persists in terms of access to education and will provide a factual response to the menace.

The majority of the respondents (62.2 percent) are between the ages of 21 and 30 Years. This segment of the population falls within the youthful population and is classified to be the age at which the female child is expected to complete all levels of schooling (primary to tertiary level). Sampling such a category of the youthful population guaranteed evidenced-based findings which might correlate with lived experiences.

On the religious affiliation of the respondents, Islam happens to be the dominant religion in the study area with most of the respondents (94.9 percent) being adherent to the Islamic faith. This is unconnected to the fact that Sokoto State happens to be the seat and cradle of Islamic religion, as most of the respondents are descendants of Uthman bin Fodiyo who spearheaded the 1804 Jihad that mounted Sokoto the cradle of Islam in Nigeria.

More than half of the respondents (54.4 percent) had a post-secondary qualification. This is a clear indication that tertiary education is taken with utmost importance among individuals in Sokoto State, especially with the availability of different tertiary institutions of learning in the State capital. This means most parents were willing to send their wards to a higher institution of learning due to availability and accessibility.

Table 4: Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents II

Variable	Status	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status of the Respondents	Single/Never Married	516	46.1
	Married	567	50.7
	Divorced	15	1.3
	Separated	18	1.6
	Widow(er)	3	.3
	Total		1119
Respondents' Ethnic Group	Ethnic Group	Frequency	Percentage
	Hausa	822	73.5
	Fulani	261	23.3
	Yoruba	30	2.7
	Igbo	3	.3
	Others	3	.3
	Total		1119
Respondents' Occupation	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
	Student	57	5.1
	Civil Servant	174	15.5
	Business	453	40.5
	Farmers	390	34.9
	Artisan	45	4.0
	Total		1119
Income Level of Respondents	Income	Frequency	Percentage
	10,000-20999	117	10.5
	21,000-30,999	153	13.7
	31,000-40,999	486	43.4
	41,000-50,999	285	25.5
	51,000-Above	78	7.0
Total		1119	100.0

Half of the respondents (50.7 percent) were married while almost half of the respondents (46.1 percent) were single or never married. This implies that most of the respondents either got married while still schooling or got married having completed their post-secondary education. The implication of such is that girls usually get married between the age of 20- to 30 years in Sokoto State and are usually compelled to present to suitors once they attain such age even while still schooling.

Most of the respondents (73.5 percent) belong to Hausa ethnic group and this is due to the nature of Sokoto State being a major Hausa ethnic affiliation. This implication of such is that most of the respondents will be likely influenced by Hausa's socio-cultural values of preference for male child dominance over the females.

Almost half of the respondents (40.5 percent) engaged in different businesses as a source of livelihood. This is a clear indication that despite having post-secondary qualifications, most individuals in the state hardly rely on a white-collar job for survival.

Almost half of the respondents (43.4 percent) earn between 31,000-40,999 naira monthly. This signifies that most individuals in Sokoto State earn more than the minimum wage in their legitimate businesses monthly.

Table 5: Causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State

Religious Factor	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Contributing to Female Low Participation in Higher Education	Yes	624	55.8
	No	495	44.2
	Total	1119	100.0
Child Domestic Labour Contributing to Female Low Participation in Western Education	Labour	Frequency	Percentage
	Hawking by Girls	357	31.9
	Performing Household Chores	327	29.2
	Fetching Water From Distance Places	117	10.5
	Caring for Younger ones	54	4.8
	Working as House Maid	264	23.6
	Total	1119	100.0
Poverty Contributing to Female Low Participation in Higher Education	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	879	78.6
	No	237	21.2
	Others (specify)...	3	0.3
	Total	1119	100.0
Availability of Female Teachers Impacting on Female Participation in Higher Education	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	They serve as role models for other Girls	78	7.0
	They Make the Place Girl Friendly	258	23.1
	They give Girls more Confidence to Participate	783	70.0
	Total	1119	100.0

More than half of the respondents (55.8 percent) agreed that religious factors contribute to the low participation of females in higher education in Sokoto State. This is unconnected to the fact that Sokoto State is notably known to be an Islamic state enshrined with Islamic norms and values. The major problem linking religious factors as an attribute leading to low participation of females in higher education is that certain religious scriptures are misinterpreted.

Findings from the qualitative data clearly show that religious leaders play a pivotal role in providing awareness and religious interpretations of the need to adequately educate women in the community. In addition to that, traditional rulers especially the Sultan of Sokoto were greatly commended for the relentless effort in instilling and promoting girl-child access to formal education among other rulers and the district heads. In an interview session, a participant highlighted that:

As I said the Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence is making efforts to ensure that parents adhere to rules and policies created by him to prevent girl-child from not going to school. Problems like early marriage, and hawking, have to stop and any parents caught trying to marry their child by force without the proper education would be punished. He warned every District head, and ward head to report any child abuse to him which include not only child molestation but depriving children especially girl-child the right to western education (Male Traditional Ruler, Urban Area).

This signifies that the effort of traditional rulers and religious leaders is greatly commendable for promoting girl-child education to the doorstep of the masses coupled with the vital role played by religious leaders in creating awareness of girls and women through practicing, teaching, and preaching, and awareness campaigns.

In another dimension, the study discovered that gender inequality is depriving female's right to education (Western education) using early marriage, non-enrollment into formal schooling, religious excuses and misinterpretation, culture, and so many reasons believed by parents/guardians as legitimate. Government intervention had helped to drastically minimize the enrollment ratio.

More than a quarter of the respondents (31.9 percent) are of the view that domestic labor contributes to the low participation of females in education in Sokoto State, especially in terms of hawking. This implies that some parents prefer to send the female child on hawking with the notion that the girl-child will generate funds that will be used for her marriage.

Most of the respondents (78.6 percent) agreed that poverty is the major factor leading to the low participation of females in higher education. This implies that most parents cannot afford to send and maintain the dues of sponsoring a female child into a higher institution of learning. This is a clear indication that most parents in the state cannot afford to sponsor all their children into higher institutions of learning, thus involving preferential treatment of sponsoring the male child.

The above finding is similar to data generated by the qualitative data, the findings exhibit that financial crises were the major problem hindering most parents from sending the female child into formal schooling, it is as such that parents substitute enrolling the male child to the female, to further affirm the above finding, a participant revealed that:

It is said that "Now a day's girls are more than boys because even in those days the problem that makes females not to go to school is the issue of financial problem that is why some of them are not furthering their education so many of them want to continue but due to financial problem they could not (FGD Rural Area).

The majority of the respondents (70.0 percent) agreed that the availability of female teachers positively impacts female participation in higher education as female teachers give girls more confidence to participate in higher institutions of learning. The implication of such is that once there is an abundant supply of female teachers in a particular institution of learning, it will attract more female students to participate in such higher institutions of learning. This is unconnected to the higher participation of females in the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

Contrary to the above, findings from qualitative data explored that some LGAs especially in the rural areas of the state are confronted with an inadequate supply of female teachers while even the available teachers were youth corps members; this is attributed to the low participation in higher education by the females in the area. To affirm the above findings, a participant unraveled that:

Despite the access to education by the girl-child, there are no adequate female teachers as you can see we are few, this is courtesy of lack of interest in furthering their education to tertiary level. (Female Primary Head Teacher, Rural Area).

In addition to the above, urban areas which have abundant teaching staff (both male and females) and facilities complained of rising immorality, especially in mixed schools of boys and girls. Most often, boys and girls have usually seen either walking back home together or sighted in locations discussing personal issues which go against the socio-cultural values of the study area. This discourages parents from enrolling girls into a mixed school and opting for the girl's school, in the absence of the girl's school, the girls will automatically miss the chance of enrolling in a western school. A male traditional ruler affirms the above statement below:

The only problem we have is, in the mixed school, where after school closes, the students (Male and female) do find a place and sit down discussing personal issues which can discourage some parents from taking their children to school more especially the females. Which lead to the establishment of Girls Community School Gwadabawa (Male Traditional Ruler, Rural Area).

Furthermore, data from the qualitative reveals that distance was another factor hindering female participation in western schooling, especially in secondary and tertiary institutions. The study reveals that females in rural areas of the state had to walk for kilometers before accessing their schools; this is why stakeholders recommended the establishment of more secondary schools in the rural areas as well as the establishment of a tertiary institution in each local government or boundary of a local government.

Table 6: Causes of gender inequality in education enrolment in Sokoto State

Age considered Appropriate for Girls to Marry	Age	Frequency	Percentage
	12-14 Years	24	2.1
	15-17 Years	84	7.5
	18 Years and Above	1011	90.3
	Total	1119	100.0
Marriage as a Factor in Girls' Enrolment in Higher Education	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	870	77.7
	No	240	21.4
	3	9	.8
	Total	1119	100.0
Effects of Early Marriage on Girls' Education	Effects	Frequency	Percentage
	It Prevents Girl-Child Enrolment	87	7.8
	It Affects Girl-Child Retention	273	24.4
	It affects Girl Child Transition to a Higher Level	720	64.3
	Others (Specify)...	39	3.5
	Total	1119	100.0
Impact of Availability of Sanitary on Gender Inequality in Access to Western Education	Response	Frequency	Percentage
	Yes	720	64.3
	No	399	35.7
	Total	1119	100.0

Most of the respondents (90.3 percent) revealed that the appropriate age for girls to marry is 18 Years and Above. The implication of such is that once the girl-child attains such age and still schooling or yet to be enrolled into any higher institution of learning, parents will be disturbed and may want the girl-child to get married at the stipulated age the society considers appropriate.

The majority of the respondents (77.7 percent) agreed that age at marriage is a factor in girls' enrolment in higher institutions. This implies that once the girl-child clicks the timing for marriage, marriage becomes important at that particular point in time rather than enrolling into a higher institution of learning.

Based on the qualitative data analysis, participants strongly promote educating the girl-child from primary to the tertiary level. Despite dignifying marrying off the girl-child when the timing for marriage clocks in, the study discovered contractual agreement between the groom and the family of the bride to allow the girl-child completes her education; in some instances from primary to tertiary, while in other scenarios, the compulsory schooling must be completed even after marriage. A religious leader affirms that:

Yes, most of us now a day are in habit of encouraging the girl-child to pursue their education from primary to tertiary level. There are cases where a man coming to marry a girl has to agree as to whether he will allow the girl in question to further her education after marriage if he so agrees. If he agrees then the marriage will take place (Religious Leader, Rural Area).

To further affirm the above view, a school principal further revealed that:

In my 16years as a principal, I have come across a situation whereby pupils can be removed from school and get married. But with the intervention of NGOs and government awareness, this problem was drastically reduced. Currently, girl-child can further their education up to tertiary level” (Male Principal, Urban Area).

The findings show that despite the prevalence of early marriage in the study area, sensitization campaigns to parents led to improvement in the education of girls up to the tertiary level. The majority of the respondents (64.3 percent) agreed that early marriage affects a girl's participation in higher education as it affects the girl-child transition to a higher level. This corresponds to the previous assertion that timing for marriage is more important to enrolment into higher institutions of learning. The implication of such is that there will be a high prevalence of marriage among women with secondary education or below.

The majority of the respondents (64.3 percent) revealed that the availability of sanitary facilities impacts gender inequality in access to education. This signifies that once there are accessible sanitary facilities in an institution, it will encourage girl-child access to western education.

The above findings were authenticated by the qualitative data on the idea that the absence of sanitary facilities in schools hinders most females from attending a particular western school, especially when such facilities are being shared along with their male counterparts, most times, females had to find solace in neighboring homes closer to them for convenience, a participant supported this claim below:

The major problem the girl-child doesn't like is sharing a toilet with male students which discourage some of them from attending the school. Therefore I can say education is free and accessible in my domain (Male Religious Leader, Rural Area).

Study findings suggest that providing adequate sanitary facilities in schools for females alone can increase enrollment in western education.

Discussion of the Major Findings

The study was based on a gender-sensitive situation analysis of girl-child access to education in Sokoto State. To achieve the objectives of the study, Questionnaires, KIIs, FGDs, and IDIs sessions were held with different stakeholders. Below is the discussion of the major findings in line with the objectives of the study.

On the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, findings from the study discovered a strong relationship between sex, age, religion, and parents' level of income. The aforementioned variables strongly serve as a link to gender preference and access to girl-child education in Sokoto State.

A major factor perpetuating inequality in western schooling against the girl-child is that certain socio-cultural factors hinder female education; these include culture, religion, marriage and the perceived outcome of the educational and economic labor force as parents of low socio-economic status believe only the children of the elite benefit from the system by gaining employment while children of the poor languish in the streets. This corroborates findings by Makuro (2014) who asserted that such factors include endemic poverty, schooling cost, the burden of household labor, shortage of school facilities, negative and even dangerous school environment,

and cultural and social practices that discriminate against girls including early marriage and restriction on female mobility and limited employment opportunities for women.

Findings from the study attributed the adoption of European and western cultural values and attributes which goes against the socio-cultural and religious teachings of the study area; this is because of the traditional belief of immorality in tertiary institutions which was identified to be the major factor hindering women from enrolling into tertiary institutions. Furthermore, major discoveries from the study attributed low enrollment into tertiary institutions to socio-cultural values especially tracing the origin of western education to Christian missionaries as parents believed the traditional socio-cultural and religious values of the females will be indoctrinated in tertiary institutions. Adeyemi and Akpotu, (2004); Adeyeye, (2014) supported the argument that at higher educational levels in Nigeria, there is still wide gender inequality, with females being dominated. Mohammed, Horo, Muhammad and Ibrahim (2019) further corroborated the above findings with the view that parents have the belief that “girl-child education is corrupting the female children” and the belief that “the way modern schools operate is not consistent with Islamic religion” was the major religious belief preventing parents from sending their girls to school

Despite the aforementioned socio-cultural milieu hindering parents from sending girls into higher institutions of learning, findings from the study discovered that parents in urban areas send females to tertiary institutions like the school of health technology, school of Nursing and Midwifery, college of education, and polytechnic. Enrollment into university is relatively low and this is due to the prolonged years of studying mandatory youth service, and above all the belief that all acts of immorality are learned in the university. Tinuke, (2011) validated the argument that Statistics from the National University Commission (NUC), have indicated that female enrollment in undergraduate programs in Nigerian Universities has never reached 40%.

An overwhelming discovery by the study was that most stakeholders unraveled that the appropriate age for a girl to marry is 18 years and above and age at marriage is a factor in girls’ enrolment in higher institutions signifying preference for marriage once the timing for marriage clocks in. Makuro (2014) validated the above finding that certain social practices discriminate against girl-child education, especially early marriage. This validates the findings by Mohammed and Dauda, (2022) who unraveled that parents consider timing for marriage importance and thus consider any girl-child that has attain puberty stage ripe for marriage even when she is below 18 years of age and still attending basic schooling.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a situation analysis of Gender and girl-child access to education in Sokoto State with specific interest on the causes of gender inequality in girl-child enrolment into formal schooling in Sokoto State. The analysis was based on a quantitative and qualitative survey implemented across six LGAs of Sokoto State. Based on the situation analysis, the study concludes that despite awareness and sensitization campaigns, gender inequality in education enrolment is still persistent in rural villages of the state which is unconnected to certain socio-cultural, economic, and religious factors rooted in a preference for early marriage over secondary and post-secondary education enrolment, parents’ socio-economic status, and perceived westernization and the substitution of traditional African values for European values and ideologies and religious misinterpretation to low educated parents.

In a bid to ensure gender equity in education enrolment in Sokoto, findings from the study recommended continuous sensitization, especially to parents residing in rural villages on the importance of enrolling the girl-child into formal schooling and ensuring such schooling cycle of pre-primary to post-secondary is attained and completed, this will serve as a morale booster to the younger generation of females to achieve the status of doctors, nurses, and midwives.

On a further note, the responsibility of enrolling and educating the girl-child to discover her potential, such effort should not be left in the hands of the government alone, stakeholders’ collaboration comprising of traditional rulers, religious leaders, and philanthropic individuals on the need to encourage, motivate and support the

younger generation of females as well as to convince parents in the rural areas to allow education prevail over marriage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study from the situation analysis, the study proffered the under-listed recommendations:

1. To achieve a massive acceptance towards girl-child enrolment into formal schooling up to the tertiary level, there is a need for huge financial support for women who complete tertiary education while getting married; this will encourage more women to substitute early marriage for the completion of tertiary education due to the huge financial benefit during the marriage.
2. Philanthropic individuals, concerned organizations, and conscious stakeholders should take with utmost priority girl-child education to ensure a levelling ground is provided to both males and females, this can be achieved when these stakeholders favour female education and provide scholarships and sponsorship to females who excel academically at the end of primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools, this will encourage recalcitrant parents to be influenced by the financial benefits the girl-child will attract to the family.
3. Automatic employment should be guaranteed to females who vehemently excel in tertiary institutions, especially in health-related disciplines; this will serve as a source of encouragement to other parents to encourage their female child to be a health expert someday to help the entire community.
4. There is a need for continuous sensitization of religious leaders especially religious leaders promoting religious misinterpretation as it relates to the issue of early marriage, this can be achieved when traditional and concerned religious leaders collectively sensitize community members on the importance of girl-child education from primary to tertiary level.
5. Even though poverty was also identified by stakeholders among factors hindering female participation in western schooling despite the free education scheme in existence in the state, there is a need for the provision of necessary facilities, equipment, and a knowledgeable teaching workforce (especially female teachers) to serve as a source of motivation and social protection to parents.
6. There is a need for the provision of sanitary facilities in all government-owned schools in the state; this can be provided by the PTA and other concerned stakeholders and philanthropic individuals without necessarily relying on the government.

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