



Senior Secondary School Biology Teachers' Perspectives on Factors Affecting Girl-Child Education in Kwara North Senatorial District, Nigeria

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Abstract

The low enrollment of girls in secondary schools across the Kwara North senatorial district has become a significant challenge to educational progress in the region. Some educators attribute this issue to parental restrictions that prevent girls from pursuing secondary education. This study investigated the perspectives of senior secondary school biology teachers on the factors affecting girl-child education in Kwara North, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a target population of 270 biology teachers from Edu, Moro, and Patigi Local Government Areas of Kwara State. Using a convenience sampling method, participants were selected for the study. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire titled "Senior Secondary School Biology Teachers' Views on Factors Affecting Girl-Child Education." Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were used to analyze the research questions, while chi-square tests were applied to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The results indicated that parental perceptions of girls as financial contributors to their households significantly impact their educational opportunities. The study concluded that socio-cultural factors play a fundamental role in shaping girl-child education in Kwara North, Nigeria. To address this challenge, it was recommended that the government implement free education at all levels to ensure that children from low-income families have access to schooling. Furthermore, strong legal measures should be enacted to eradicate discrimination against girls in education, with strict penalties, including imprisonment, for those who deny them their right to quality education.

Keywords: Girl Child, Social-Cultural Background, Socio-Economic Status

Introduction

Education is the process of imparting knowledge to those without experience to foster their growth in various aspects such as physical, mental, social, emotional, spiritual, political, and economic areas. Igbinedion and Ojeaga (2012) describe education as a critical avenue for both national and individual progress. Additionally, Okebukola (2012) suggests that education serves to update an individual's knowledge and skills, making them beneficial to both themselves and society. Therefore, education is an essential tool for development. In any well-functioning society, education is regarded as a means to power, prestige, survival, greatness, and advancement for all individuals. It serves as a fundamental cultural element, functioning as a continuous learning journey that enables individuals of all ages to comprehend the relationship between their surroundings and their personal experiences. Education contributes to the development of a well-rounded, rational personality. It is widely accepted that education plays a vital role in the socio-economic and political development of any nation. Odo et al. (2010) define education as the transmission of valuable knowledge that helps individuals become informed and contributing members of society. Education also involves acquiring certain behavioral traits such as skills, attitudes, beliefs, reasoning abilities, and knowledge, which enable effective interaction and adjustment within society.

From these definitions, it is clear that scholars emphasize both the essence of education and its significance in national development. Education equips individuals with the capacity to make meaningful contributions to their country's growth. For education to fulfill its crucial role, it must be both functional and effective. This

functionality and effectiveness are reflected in the positive changes it brings about in people's thoughts, feelings, and interactions with their physical, social, economic, cultural, and political environments (Ocho, 2005). Ocho (2005) also asserts that functional education prepares citizens who excel in character and learning to actively participate in and contribute to the nation's development. Education is widely recognized as an invaluable tool and a driving force for achieving the desired national economic growth and development. Formal education occurs within a school setting, involving the teaching and learning process, and the quality of teachers directly influences the quality of students. One of the subjects taught in schools is biology.

Biology, a branch of natural science, examines the living world by exploring its structure, functions, origins, and interactions among organisms and their environments (Umar, 2011). It serves as a fundamental discipline for various fields that drive technological progress, including medicine, pharmacy, nursing, agriculture, forestry, biotechnology, and nanotechnology (Ahmed, 2008; Ahmed & Abimbola, 2011). In Nigeria, biology is a core subject in the secondary school curriculum, and more students opt to take it in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) compared to subjects like physics and chemistry (West African Examination Council, 2011). As a subject taught in schools, biology aims to facilitate meaningful learning experiences that bring about positive behavioural changes in students. These behavioural transformations should not stem from innate abilities, maturation, or temporary conditions. However, Nigeria continues to face a high rate of illiteracy, which remains a pressing concern for policymakers and economic planners, prompting continuous efforts to expand access to education.

The education of girls remains a pressing concern in many developing nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where a substantial number of young girls do not have access to formal schooling. UNICEF (2007), as referenced in Nmadu (2010), estimated that approximately 121 million children worldwide are out of school, with around 65 million of them being girls. Notably, over 80% of these girls reside in sub-Saharan Africa. The region also has some of the lowest secondary school completion rates globally, raising significant concerns. Research indicates that half of the world's out-of-school children are concentrated in just 15 countries, with eight of these nations located in sub-Saharan Africa (Ibrahim, 2012). Furthermore, the number of girls excluded from education in sub-Saharan Africa has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002 (Offorma, 2009).

For more than two decades, scholars across various disciplines have conducted studies and reviews on girl-child education in Nigeria. These studies have led to various propositions and agreements on the subject. The perception of girl-child education programs varies among different stakeholders. For example, the Ministry of Education often views these programs as formal school initiatives aimed at ensuring that all girls in school receive the best possible learning experience. On the other hand, individuals engaged in non-formal education consider it a program aimed at giving out-of-school girls a chance to recover lost educational opportunities. Others perceive it as vocational training designed to equip these girls with essential skills for financial independence (Abdulkarim & Mamman, 2014). The education of the girl-child serves as a means of preparing young girls to become active and productive members of society (Iwalaiye et al., 2016).

Women have consistently demonstrated strong academic performance across all levels of education, despite the obstacles they encounter. Schacter (2010) emphasized that intelligence in children is significantly influenced by environmental factors, with early childhood playing a vital role in shaping future achievements. Expanding on this idea, Stronquist (2000) highlights that educating girls equips them with the knowledge, skills, and cognitive abilities necessary to contribute meaningfully to their personal development, families, and society. Education empowers women by enabling them to seize opportunities that enhance their well-being and that of their families, preparing them for workforce participation, and increasing their awareness of their legal and reproductive rights. Furthermore, foundational education provides essential knowledge on health, nutrition, and family planning, allowing girls and women to make informed choices about their lives and well-being (Aja-Okorie, 2013).

Acknowledging the vital role of education in both personal and societal advancement, Asiegbu et al. (2015) highlight that Nigeria's educational philosophy is rooted in ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all citizens at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, both within formal institutions and alternative education systems. The emphasis on girl-child education has remained a central theme in gender studies in Nigeria due to the persistent disparities in school enrollment between boys and girls. In response to these challenges, Abdulkarim and Mamman (2014) observed that various government initiatives have been introduced

to promote educational opportunities for both genders, enabling them to reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society. As a result, Nigeria's Federal and State governments have developed policies aimed at fostering inclusive education, ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of gender or ethnicity, have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills.

Culture encompasses the entirety of a society's way of life, including its knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, and other attributes that individuals acquire as members of that society. It reflects the collective lifestyle of a community, shaped by environmental influences and prevailing social conditions (Nakpodia, 2010). Additionally, culture can be understood as the shared practices, values, and beliefs of a social group, which are passed down from one generation to the next, often undergoing modifications over time. According to Nakpodia (2010), culture consists of both material and non-material elements that are learned and transmitted through social interactions within a group. It is a shared experience among members of a community and is continuously practiced across generations. While cultural traits vary across different societies, they can also differ within the same group due to factors such as modernization and external influences. As a dynamic rather than static phenomenon, culture is reflected in learned behaviors rather than inherited traits. In Nigeria, cultural aspects such as traditions, values, routines, and societal expectations play a significant role in shaping girl-child education.

Cultural traditions and societal norms play a major role in limiting girls' access to education. Adebola et al. (2012) examined the socio-cultural barriers affecting the education of girls in Nigeria and suggested empowerment strategies to address these challenges. Their study focused on all 228 female load carriers in three major markets in Ibadan, Oyo State, utilizing a census approach for data collection. Structured questionnaires were employed to gather information, and the responses were analyzed using frequency counts and mean statistics. The findings identified early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and restrictive cultural taboos as key factors negatively impacting the education and well-being of girls in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study revealed that these socio-cultural constraints contribute to poverty and cause both psychological and physiological harm to the affected girls. To address these issues, the researchers proposed that providing girls with educational opportunities, vocational training, and support networks—such as girls' clubs in schools and marketplaces—could enhance their personal and economic development. Based on these insights, the study recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria enforce strict regulations against harmful practices targeting girls and women, ensuring that violators face legal consequences regardless of their social standing.

A key cultural element shaping girl-child education in many Sub-Saharan African societies is the practice of initiation ceremonies, which mark the transition from childhood to adulthood (Ahmad & Najeemah, 2013). Research by Ahmad and Najeemah (2013) indicates that girls who undergo these traditional rites often find it difficult to continue their education, as societal expectations push them toward marriage instead. Early marriage is another significant obstacle to girls' education, as it frequently interrupts their academic progress and limits their future opportunities. Bolaji (2007) highlighted that early marriage is deeply entrenched in certain regions of Nigeria, such as Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Bauchi, and Kaduna. While this practice was once widespread among the Ibos, Ibibios, and Urhobos, the spread of Western education has contributed to its decline, though it has not been completely eliminated.

Girls are often married off for a variety of social and economic reasons, further restricting their ability to pursue an education. Even when girls manage to access schooling, they may face challenges that go beyond financial and logistical barriers. Onyeike and Angela (2011) pointed out that, in addition to physical threats, girls in educational institutions frequently experience subtle forms of discrimination that undermine their confidence, self-esteem, and sense of identity. These societal pressures make it difficult for many girls to remain in school, ultimately limiting their ability to achieve economic independence and contribute fully to their communities. Supporting female education is vital for boosting Nigeria's economic and social progress, as it strengthens human capital, curbs population growth, and alleviates poverty. On the other hand, a lack of education negatively impacts individuals, families, and society as a whole. Gender inequality in Nigeria influences both access to education and the ability of girls to enroll and remain in school. Research has consistently highlighted the gap in educational opportunities between male and female children. However, limited studies have explored the perspectives of biology teachers on the factors influencing girls' education in secondary schools across Edu, Moro, and Patigi Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Nigeria. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Statement of the Problem

The limited enrollment of girls in secondary schools within the Kwara North senatorial district has emerged as a major challenge for educational development in the region (Okafor et al., 2018). This issue has been linked to insufficient parental awareness of the importance of educating girls. Some educators have even noted that certain parents actively prevent their daughters from continuing their education at the secondary level. Various socio-cultural factors contribute to the preference for boys' education over girls' in this area, affecting overall female participation in schooling. Given the essential role of girl-child education in national development, ensuring equitable access to quality education is imperative (Orji, 2010). Addressing this concern requires strategies to increase girls' enrollment in secondary schools. This study aims to identify the socio-cultural factors that hinder girl-child education, particularly traditional customs and religious beliefs that may discourage female participation in schooling. Additionally, it seeks to examine parental influences on educational decisions affecting girls. To gain deeper insight into these issues, this research focuses on the perspectives of senior secondary school biology teachers regarding the factors shaping girl-child education in Kwara North senatorial district, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions had been formulated to guide the study:

1. How do socio-economic factors influence girl child education in secondary school in Kwara North senatorial district, Nigeria?
2. What influence does a socio-cultural factor have on girl child education in secondary schools in Kwara North senatorial district, Nigeria?

Methodology

The researchers employed a descriptive survey research design for this study. The target population consisted of all 270 senior secondary school biology teachers in Edu, Patigi, and Moro Local Government Areas of Kwara State, Nigeria. This population served as the basis for selecting the research sample. A convenience sampling technique was utilized, with all 270 biology teachers from these local government areas included in the study. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, as it facilitates the gathering of detailed and factual information. The questionnaire, titled Senior Secondary School Biology Teachers' Views on Factors Influencing Girl-Child Education, was designed with closed-ended questions. It followed a four-point Likert scale format, offering response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). This format allowed respondents to select the option that best reflected their views. For data analysis, the study employed descriptive statistical methods, specifically frequency counts and percentage analysis, to address the research questions.

Results

Table 1: Mean responses regarding the socio-economic factors affecting girl-child education in secondary schools within Kwara North Senatorial District, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Parents believe that girls can contribute financially to the family.	3.30	0.853	Agreed
2	Girls are often engaged in street hawking and daily income-generating activities.	3.02	0.885	Agreed
3	Early courtship of girls is encouraged as it brings financial benefits to parents.	3.00	0.969	Agreed
4	Some girls serve as guides for beggars, generating income for their families.	2.78	1.025	Agreed
5	The cost of school fees is perceived as a financial burden by parents.	2.94	0.951	Agreed
6	Schools are not considered profitable ventures by some families.	2.94	0.964	Agreed
7	Formal education is viewed as an investment with no immediate financial returns.	3.15	0.966	Agreed
8	Parents frequently assign girls to work, limiting their educational opportunities.	3.01	0.99	Agreed
9	The absence of fully free education discourages the enrollment of girls in school.	2.96	0.967	Agreed
10	The socio-economic status of families serves as a barrier to girl-child education.	2.98	0.971	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.01	0.954	Agreed

Table 1 presents responses on the impact of socio-economic factors on girl-child education. The factor with the highest response rate is parents' belief that girls can contribute financially to the family, with a mean score of 3.30. The second highest-rated factor is the perception that formal education does not provide immediate financial returns, receiving a mean score of 3.15. The lowest-rated factor is the practice of girls serving as guides for beggars to generate income, which has a mean score of 2.78.

Table 2: Mean responses on the socio-cultural factors impacting girl-child education in secondary schools within Kwara North Senatorial District, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Family dynamics play a significant role in shaping girl-child education.	3.41	0.791	Agreed
2	Public criticism of a girl's family impacts decisions regarding her education.	3.00	0.818	Agreed
3	Cultural restrictions on the interaction between boys and girls affect girl-child education.	2.97	0.921	Agreed
4	Negative perceptions of formal education for girls hinder their academic progress.	2.98	0.919	Agreed
5	Parental violations of children's rights contribute to limited educational opportunities for girls.	3.01	0.909	Agreed
6	A preference for educating boys over girls influences girl-child education.	2.98	0.979	Agreed
7	Parents who support girl-child education often face societal criticism.	3.08	0.843	Agreed
8	Traditional norms assign domestic responsibilities to females, limiting their schooling.	2.89	1.05	Agreed
9	Parental illiteracy reduces awareness of the importance of educating girls.	2.94	0.989	Agreed
10	Weak enforcement of laws protecting girls' rights negatively impacts their education.	3.04	0.98	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.03	0.9199	Agreed

To address research question 2, Table 2 provides valuable insights. The data indicate that family influence plays a significant role in girl-child education, receiving the highest mean score of 3.41. The second most influential factor is the criticism faced by parents who support girl-child education, with a mean score of 3.08. The factor with the lowest response rate is the cultural belief that females are primarily meant for domestic work, which has a mean score of 2.89.

Discussion

The study found that parents often view girls as a source of income for the family, which aligns with Oleribe's (2007) research. His study highlighted that many school-age girls in Northern Nigeria spend school hours hawking goods along roads and in markets, particularly on Fridays, or assisting with farming activities such as planting, weeding, and harvesting. Additionally, girls are frequently engaged in household responsibilities, such as childcare and meal preparation, further limiting their educational opportunities. The study also revealed that family influence plays a significant role in shaping girls' access to education. This finding supports Ahmad and Najeemah's (2013) research, which indicated that girls who have undergone traditional initiation rites often face difficulties in continuing their education, as marriage is typically the next expected step. Early marriage remains one of the most commonly cited factors that hinder girl-child education, as it directly conflicts with school attendance and academic progression.

Conclusion

The study has established that parents use girls to generate money for their family by sending them to hawk several wares or do other work to fend for the family. The study also concluded that socio-cultural factors can influence girl child education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should implement free education at all levels to enable low-income parents to enroll their children in school without financial constraints.
2. Strong legal frameworks should be established to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls, ensuring their right to quality education. Additionally, penalties should be enforced for individuals or institutions that deny girls access to education.

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