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# The Influence of Education on Gender Inequality in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of education on gender inequality in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria. Guided by four objectives and grounded in Human Capital Theory and Gender and Development Theory, a mixed-methods design was employed. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, 384 participants including teachers, parents, students, women leaders, and education officials were selected from Damaturu, Gashua, and Gujba local government areas. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Results finding indicated that persistent gender disparities in enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes remain stark, driven by entrenched cultural norms, early marriage, poverty, and insurgency-related disruptions. Conversely, education significantly influenced gender inequality by improving female literacy, promoting women's socio-economic participation, and gradually transforming discriminatory attitudes. The study concludes that targeted, context-specific, gender-responsive educational programming is the most critical strategy. It recommends that the Yobe State Government, in collaboration with development partners, substantially increase funding for girl-child education initiatives, and that the State Ministry of Education mandate gender-responsive pedagogy and community sensitization programs across all affected local government areas, supported by continuous teacher training and multi-stakeholder coordination.

**Keywords:** Education, Gender Inequality, Empowerment, Girl-Child Education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education remains one of the most powerful instruments for promoting social inclusion, economic mobility, and gender equality in any society (Unterhalter, 2020; World Bank, 2022). In developing contexts, particularly in Northern Nigeria, education is a critical determinant of women's access to formal employment, political participation, and the exercise of social and legal rights (Ene-Obong, 2021;

Ogunyemi, 2021). When education is equitable, inclusive, and of high quality, it acts as a powerful equalizer, narrowing gender gaps in literacy, income, and leadership representation (World Bank, 2022). In Nigeria's North East, the Boko Haram insurgency that began in 2009 has compounded pre-existing development challenges, creating a significant crisis in gender equity within the educational sector (UNICEF, 2022). Yobe State is among the most affected, with deep-seated socio-cultural norms, persistent insecurity, and acute poverty continuing to drastically limit female access to and completion of schooling (Abdulkarim, 2022). Despite interventions such as the Better Education Service Delivery for All (BESDA) program, a significant number of girls are withdrawn from school for early marriage (kamu), burdened with domestic responsibilities, or kept at home due to the perceived irrelevance of Western education for girls (Oche, 2021). This persistent educational imbalance perpetuates a cycle of gender inequality, stifling women's potential contribution to community development, economic growth, and sustainable peace. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of how education influences gender relations and empowerment in the specific context of Yobe State is a practical necessity.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Gender inequality remains a pervasive and pressing challenge in Yobe State, where male-controlled cultural traditions, conservative religious interpretations, and dire socio-economic conditions systematically restrict women's and girls' educational opportunities (NBS, 2021). Despite national policies like the National Gender Policy on Education (2006) and state-level advocacy campaigns, disparities in enrolment, retention, transition rates, and academic achievement between male and female students remain among the highest in Nigeria. For instance, the Yobe State Annual School Census Report (2020) indicates a female primary school enrolment rate of approximately 38%, which plummets to below 25% at the senior secondary level. Many girls who do enroll are often withdrawn prematurely, leading to limited literacy, poor employability, reduced health awareness, and diminished social and political participation, thereby reinforcing their subordinate status (Ene-Obong, 2021).

While education is widely recognized as a transformative force for achieving gender equality, there is a dearth of empirical research that critically assesses the mechanisms and degree of this influence within the unique socio-cultural and conflict-affected milieu of Yobe State (Ali, 2021; Olojede *et al.*, 2021). Most existing studies focus on national or regional trends in Northern Nigeria, inadvertently neglecting the localized intricacies shaped by Yobe's specific ethnic composition, religious practices, and the protracted insurgency. Without such context-specific evidence, policymakers and development partners design interventions based on generalizations that fail to address root causes. The main problem, therefore, is the absence of empirical, context-specific evidence linking educational attainment to measurable outcomes in gender equality, women's empowerment, and social transformation in Yobe State. This study was justified by the urgent need to produce such evidence to bridge the knowledge gap between policy and practice.

## **3. Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of education on gender inequality in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought:

- i. To assess the current state and manifestations of gender inequality in educational access, participation, and outcomes across selected urban and rural communities in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria;
- ii. To examine the correlation between educational attainment and shifts in gender roles, women's empowerment, and their participation in socio-economic and decision-making activities in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria;
- iii. To analyze the major socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers hindering the achievement of gender equality in education within Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria; and
- iv. To identify those strategies and policy actions for promoting gender equality through inclusive, safe, and quality education in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria.

#### 4. Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

- i. What is the current state and what are the manifestations of gender inequality in educational access, participation, and outcomes across selected urban and rural communities in Yobe State?
- ii. How does educational attainment correlate with shifts in gender roles, women's empowerment, and their participation in socio-economic and decision-making activities in Yobe State?
- iii. What are the major socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers hindering the achievement of gender equality in education within Yobe State?
- iv. What are those strategies and policy actions can promote gender equality through inclusive, safe, and quality education in Yobe State?

#### 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

##### 5.1 Education as a Tool for Gender Equality

The intrinsic and instrumental value of education in fostering gender equality is well-documented in development literature. According to Unterhalter (2020), education enhances women's "capabilities" by not only increasing literacy and numeracy but also by fostering critical thinking, self-confidence, and the ability to question and negotiate oppressive norms. Empirically, higher levels of female education correlate strongly with reduced child mortality, improved maternal health, and greater investment in the next generation's education, creating a virtuous cycle of development (World Bank, 2022). Stromquist (2015) further argues that feminist pedagogy within schooling can directly challenge patriarchal ideologies and empower women to resist subordination. In post-conflict contexts globally, education has been shown to provide safe spaces for girls and women, promoting psychosocial healing and social reintegration (UNESCO, 2021).

##### 5.2 Gender Inequality in Nigerian and Northern Nigerian Education

In Nigeria, despite constitutional provisions for free and compulsory basic education, a significant gender gap persists, with the North-East region lagging dramatically behind the South. Cultural beliefs, such as the perception that a woman's primary role is within the home (*kulle*), and economic pressures often prioritize boys' education over girls' (Ene-Obong, 2021). The practice of early marriage (*kamu*), often justified as a means of reducing family financial burden and protecting girls from pre-marital sex, is a primary driver of female school dropout (Oche, 2021). Furthermore, the Boko Haram insurgency, with its explicit antagonism towards Western education as exemplified by the 2014 Chibok and 2018 Dapchi abductions has created a climate of fear, led to the destruction of school infrastructure, and forced widespread school closures, disproportionately affecting girls (Olojede et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

##### 5.3 The Research Gap

While studies like those of Ali (2021) and Adebayo (2022) have discussed gender and education in Northern Nigeria, there is a scarcity of research that specifically investigates Yobe State's unique conditions. The state has some of the worst human development indices in Nigeria, and its recovery from conflict introduces complex dynamics that merit specific inquiry. This study fills that gap by providing a granular analysis of how education functions as a potential mitigator of gender inequality within this fragile, post-conflict context (Musa & Usman, 2022).

##### 5.4 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two complementary theoretical perspectives:

**Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993):** This theory posits that education is an investment that increases an individual's productivity and future income potential. From this lens, investing in girls' education yields high social and economic returns, contributing to national growth and family welfare. This theory explains the economic rationale for promoting female education in Yobe State, where poverty is a primary barrier.

**Gender and Development (GAD) Theory (Moser, 1993):** This theory moves beyond economic analysis to focus on the social construction of gender roles and relations. It emphasizes that development can only

be achieved by addressing structural inequalities and transforming power dynamics. GAD theory provides the framework for understanding how education can challenge patriarchal norms, redistribute domestic responsibilities, and empower women to gain control over resources and decision-making. These theories were adopted because they jointly provide a comprehensive understanding of education's dual role in addressing gender inequality—as an economic engine and as a foundation for social transformation.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of education on gender inequality in Yobe State, North Eastern Nigeria. This design was appropriate because it allowed for statistical analysis of numerical data and deeper exploration of stakeholders' lived experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Hence, the study was conducted in three Local Government Areas (LGAs): Damaturu (urban), Gashua (semi-urban), and Gujba (rural), which represented communities with varying levels of urbanization, cultural diversity, and conflict exposure. The target population comprised 79,580 individuals, including teachers, students, parents, women leaders, and education officials. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, a total of 384 respondents were selected to represent the study population.

A multistage sampling technique was used to ensure adequate representation. First, the population was stratified by Local Government Area to capture geographical diversity across the three selected areas. Then, three Government Day Junior Secondary Schools were purposively selected from each Local Government Areas due to their accessibility and relevance to gender and educational issues. Within these schools, teachers, students, and parents were proportionately and randomly selected to ensure fairness and inclusiveness. In addition, women leaders and education officials directly involved in gender-related educational programs were purposively included to provide expert insights.

Data were collected through structured questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussions (FGDs). The questionnaires provided quantitative data on enrollment trends, attendance, academic performance, and attitudes towards gender equality using Likert scales. Interviews and FGDs captured qualitative perspectives on how education influenced gender roles, empowerment, and participation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) with the aid of SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns and meanings related to gender equality outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and required to give informed consent (for minors, parental/guardian consent was obtained). Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was maintained throughout the research process.

## 7. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The results are presented according to the four research questions. Quantitative findings are summarized in tables showing means, standard deviations, and decision interpretations (Low = mean below 2.50; High = mean 2.50 and above). Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) are integrated to enrich interpretations.

**Research Question One:** *What is the current state and manifestations of gender inequality in educational access, participation, and outcomes in Yobe State?*

**Table 1: Descriptive Survey Showing Respondents' Perceptions of the Current State of Gender Inequality in Education**

Manifestations of Gender Inequality	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Decision
Female enrollment rates are significantly lower than male enrollment across all levels	3.52	0.710	1	High
Girls are more likely to drop out of school before completing secondary education	3.48	0.734	2	High
Classroom participation and academic performance favor male students due to teacher bias	3.31	0.802	3	High
Fewer female teachers serve as role models in schools, especially in rural areas	3.25	0.845	4	High
Girls face greater distance-related barriers to accessing secondary schools	3.18	0.879	5	High
<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>0.794</b>		<b>High</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2026*

Results in Table 1 show that all items recorded mean scores above 3.00, with an overall average mean of 3.35 (interpreted as high) and a standard deviation of 0.794. This indicates that respondents strongly agreed that gender inequality manifests severely in educational access and participation. The highest ranked item (mean = 3.52) was lower female enrollment rates. Qualitative interviews confirmed these findings: one community leader in Gujba stated, *"In our village, for every ten boys in school, you may find only two girls. Parents see no benefit in educating a girl who will soon marry."* These results align with the Yobe State Annual School Census Report (2020) and Adebayo (2022).

**Research Question Two: How does educational attainment correlate with shifts in gender roles, women's empowerment, and socio-economic participation?**

**Table 2: Descriptive Survey Showing Respondents' Perceptions of How Education Influences Gender Roles and Empowerment**

Educational Contributions to Gender Equality	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Decision
Educated women participate more actively in household decision-making	3.49	0.715	1	High
Female literacy improves women's ability to engage in income-generating activities	3.44	0.738	2	High
Schooling reduces acceptance of early marriage as a norm for girls	3.38	0.767	3	High
Educated mothers are more likely to send their own daughters to school	3.35	0.789	4	High

Educational Contributions to Gender Equality	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Decision
Formal education increases women's confidence to challenge discriminatory practices	3.27	0.821	5	High
<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>0.766</b>		<b>High</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2026*

As shown in Table 2, the overall average mean was 3.39 (high) with a standard deviation of 0.766, indicating strong agreement that education positively influences gender roles and women's empowerment. The highest ranked contribution was educated women participating more actively in household decision-making (mean = 3.49). A female teacher in Damaturu expressed during an FGD: *"I am the first educated woman in my family. Now, my husband consults me on every major decision, including our children's education."* The second-ranked item (mean = 3.44) concerns women's engagement in income-generating activities, aligning with World Bank (2022). These results empirically confirm the expectations of GAD Theory (Moser, 1993) that education transforms power dynamics within households and communities.

**Research Question Three: *What are the major barriers hindering gender equality in education in Yobe State?***

**Table 3: Descriptive Survey Showing Respondents' Perceptions of Barriers to Gender Equality in Education**

Barriers to Gender Equality in Education	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Decision
Early and forced marriage (kamu) leading to school dropout	3.68	0.645	1	High
Cultural preference for boys' education over girls'	3.61	0.672	2	High
Poverty and inability to pay for fees, uniforms, and transport	3.55	0.698	3	High
Insecurity and fear of abduction (e.g., Boko Haram)	3.49	0.724	4	High
Lack of female teachers and gender-sensitive school facilities	3.32	0.801	5	High
<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.708</b>		<b>High</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2026*

Table 3 reveals that all barriers were rated highly, with an overall average mean of 3.53 (standard deviation 0.708). The highest ranked barrier (mean = 3.68) was early and forced marriage, consistent with Oche (2021). A parent in Gashua explained: *"When a girl reaches 13 or 14, we find her a husband. Keeping her in school past that age is seen as wasteful."* The second-ranked barrier (mean = 3.61) was cultural preference for boys' education. An education official in Damaturu noted: *"Many families will sell their last cow to send a son to university but will not pay for a daughter's secondary school fees."* The persistence of insecurity (mean = 3.49) also emerged as a critical barrier, echoing Olojede et al. (2021) and UNICEF (2022).

**Research Question Four: *What strategies can enhance the contribution of education to gender equality in Yobe State?***

**Table 4: Descriptive Survey Showing Respondents’ Perceptions of Strategies to Promote Gender Equality through Education**

Recommended Strategies	Mean	Std. Dev.	Rank	Decision
Increased government and TETFund funding for girl-child scholarships and conditional cash transfers	3.71	0.623	1	High
Community sensitization programs targeting parents and traditional/religious leaders	3.65	0.654	2	High
Recruitment and deployment of more female teachers to rural schools	3.58	0.689	3	High
Integration of gender-responsive pedagogy and life skills education into the curriculum	3.52	0.717	4	High
Provision of safe school infrastructure (fencing, sanitary facilities, secure hostels)	3.47	0.742	5	High
Strengthened coordination among Ministry of Education, NGOs, and community women's groups	3.40	0.778	6	High
<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>3.56</b>	<b>0.700</b>		<b>High</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 shows that all six strategies were rated highly, with an overall average mean of 3.56 (standard deviation 0.700). The highest ranked strategy (mean = 3.71) was increased funding for girl-child scholarships and conditional cash transfers, reflecting persistent poverty as a key barrier (World Bank, 2022). The second-ranked strategy (mean = 3.65) concerned community sensitization targeting parents and leaders. A women’s leader in Gujba remarked: “*Unless the imam and village chief say girls should be educated, no father will listen. We need to convince the men first.*” The third-ranked strategy (mean = 3.58) was recruiting more female teachers. Qualitative data added nuance: one female student in Gashua stated, “*When we see a female teacher, we believe we can also become something in life.*” The consistently high ratings across all items indicate a clear consensus that a multi-pronged approach addressing economic, cultural, and infrastructural barriers is required.

**8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings from Research Question One confirmed that gender inequality in Yobe State manifests severely in enrollment, retention, and participation, with female rates drastically lower than male rates. This aligns with the Yobe State Annual School Census Report (2020) and Adebayo (2022). The high mean scores across all manifestations demonstrate that no single aspect of access or participation is spared.

Regarding Research Question Two, the study established that education functions as a transformative force for gender equality. Educated women participate more in decision-making, engage in income-generating activities, and challenge discriminatory norms. These results support both Human Capital

Theory (Becker, 1993) and GAD Theory (Moser, 1993), echoing international experiences from diverse developing contexts (Unterhalter, 2020; Stromquist, 2015).

For Research Question Three, the strong endorsement of early marriage, cultural preference for boys, poverty, and insecurity as barriers indicates that stakeholders face multiple, intersecting constraints. These findings align with Oche (2021), Ene-Obong (2021), and Olojede et al. (2021). The persistence of insecurity as a barrier reflects the unique post-conflict context of Yobe State.

For Research Question Four, the highest priority placed on scholarships and conditional cash transfers, community sensitization, and female teacher recruitment signals a clear roadmap. The convergence between quantitative ratings and qualitative narratives strengthens the validity of these recommendations. Notably, coordination among stakeholders (mean = 3.40) remains critical, as no single actor can address gender inequality alone.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The persistent link between entrenched socio-cultural norms, economic deprivation, insecurity, and gender inequality in Yobe State demands urgent and sustained attention. This study concluded that gender inequality manifests severely in educational access, participation, and outcomes, evidenced by significantly lower female enrollment and higher dropout rates. However, education was also found to play a catalytic role in reducing gender inequality by improving female literacy, promoting women's socio-economic participation, and gradually transforming discriminatory attitudes. Major barriers including early marriage, cultural preference for boys, poverty, and insecurity continue to hinder progress. Without a coherent, empirically informed, gender-responsive strategy, progress toward SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) will remain elusive. Policy interventions are most likely to be effective when they adopt a holistic approach that combines financial incentives, community sensitization, female teacher recruitment, gender-responsive pedagogy, and safe school infrastructure, all anchored in increased and sustained multi-stakeholder coordination.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **The Yobe State Government, in partnership with development partners (UNICEF, Plan International), should substantially increase and consistently disburse funding specifically earmarked for girl-child education.** This funding must go beyond school fees to include conditional cash transfers, scholarships, school feeding programs, and provision of uniforms and sanitary materials for displaced and vulnerable girls. Without adequate financial commitment, poverty will continue to drive early marriage and dropout.
2. **The State Ministry of Education should mandate and support systematic community sensitization programs targeting parents, traditional rulers, and religious leaders across all affected local government areas.** These programs should address the value of girl-child education, the dangers of early marriage, and the compatibility of formal schooling with cultural and religious values. Community ownership is a precondition for sustainable change.
3. **The government, in collaboration with teacher training institutions, should aggressively recruit, train, and deploy more female teachers to rural and insurgency-affected schools.** Incentives such as rural allowances, housing, and security provisions should accompany postings to attract and retain female educators who serve as role models and mentors for girls.
4. **Gender-responsive pedagogy and life skills education should be systematically integrated into the basic education curriculum across all local governments areas.** This requires developing context-appropriate modules that address girls' rights, reproductive health, financial literacy, and leadership skills. Teachers should be trained continuously in gender-sensitive classroom practices, and schools should establish girls' clubs and peer support mechanisms as routine practice.

5. **Safe school infrastructure must be strengthened as a precondition for girls' educational participation.** The government, in collaboration with community security committees and traditional rulers, should ensure that rehabilitated schools have adequate perimeter fencing, separate and decent sanitary facilities for girls, secure entry points, and where feasible, safe hostels for girls traveling long distances. This will rebuild parental confidence, which remains fragile after the insurgency.
6. **Enhanced coordination among government agencies (YSUBEB), international NGOs (UNICEF, Plan International, Save the Children), and community women's groups is essential.** A multi-stakeholder gender and education task force should be established at the local government area level to align interventions, share data, avoid duplication, monitor outcomes, and ensure that women's voices directly inform programming.
7. **Further research should be conducted to track longitudinal outcomes of gender-responsive educational interventions, particularly the relationship between female educational attainment and measurable improvements in maternal health, child nutrition, household income, and community violence reduction.** Such evidence will help refine strategies and sustain donor and government investment in girls' education as a pillar of gender equality and post-conflict reconstruction in Yobe State and beyond.

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