



RETHINKING GENDER ISSUES OF EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF FAMILY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Taofeek Taiyeola Otubanjo

Department of Social Studies

Sikiru Adetona College of Education, Science and Technology
Omu-Ajose, Ogun State

Adekunle, A. Adediran

Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies

National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), Jabi, Abuja

Email: aadediran@noun.edu.ng

Isaac Sobola

Department of Social Studies

Federal College of Education,
Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Despite significant global progress in education, gender inequality remains a pervasive issue, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, and policy inefficiencies continue to limit access to education for girls and women. This paper reviews the extent to which these disparities affect not only the educational attainment of individuals but also the broader socio-economic development of families and communities. The paper posits that gender inequities in education not only hinder individual potential but also undermine the broader goals of family and community well-being. Disparities are deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, and policy inefficiencies, which collectively perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit the progress of sustainable development. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy reform, community engagement, and targeted interventions aimed at leveling the educational playing field for all genders. Ultimately, this study underscores the critical importance of rethinking gender issues in education as a foundational step toward achieving lasting family sustainability and national development in Nigeria. It calls for immediate action from policymakers, educators, and community leaders to implement inclusive strategies that will ensure equal educational opportunities for every child, thereby fostering a more just and prosperous society.

Keywords: Rethinking, Gender issues, Education opportunity, Sustainable development

Introduction

Gender disparities in educational opportunities have been a persistent issue in Nigeria, affecting the overall development and sustainability of families and communities. Historically, societal norms and cultural practices have marginalized women and girls, limiting their access to education and subsequent opportunities for socioeconomic advancement (UNICEF, 2020). This inequality not only impacts individual educational outcomes but also has broader implications for family and community development (World Bank, 2018).

Education is a fundamental driver of sustainable development, offering individuals the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute effectively to their families and societies (UNESCO, 2019). For Nigeria, addressing gender disparities in education is crucial for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2021). However, despite various policies aimed at reducing gender gaps, significant barriers remain that hinder the full educational participation of girls and women (Eze, 2022).

The persistent gender gap in educational opportunities in Nigeria manifests in several ways, including lower enrolment rates for girls, higher dropout rates, and limited access to advanced education for women compared to their male counterparts (Akinpelu, 2021). These disparities are compounded by socio-cultural factors, such as early marriage and gender-based violence, which disproportionately affect female students (Ogunyemi & Ogunyemi, 2023). The lack of equal educational opportunities restricts women's potential to contribute to family income and community development, thus impeding the achievement of sustainable family development (Smith, 2020).

Gender Disparities in Education

Gender disparities in education remain a significant issue in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, where traditional and cultural norms often influence educational opportunities for different genders. These disparities manifest in various ways, including differences in access to

education, quality of education, and educational outcomes.

Historically, gender disparities in education have been shaped by cultural beliefs and societal norms that prioritize the education of males over females. For instance, in many Nigerian communities, traditional roles often dictate that girls are responsible for household chores and caregiving, which can limit their educational opportunities (Ogunyemi, 2019). This historical bias has led to lower enrollment rates and higher dropout rates for female students compared to their male counterparts (Adamu, 2021).

The Global Gender Gap Report (2023) indicates that while gender parity in primary education has improved, secondary and tertiary education still show significant gaps. For example, in Nigeria, the enrolment ratio of girls to boys in secondary education is lower, and this disparity becomes more pronounced at the tertiary level (UNICEF, 2022). This imbalance reflects systemic issues such as gender bias in educational policies and practices, inadequate support for female students, and socio-economic barriers (Adeniran & Oladipo, 2020).

Factors Contributing to Gender Disparities

Gender disparities in education are a complex issue influenced by a range of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote gender equity in educational opportunities. Below, we explore several key factors contributing to gender disparities in education.

1. Socio-Cultural Norms and Attitudes

One of the primary factors contributing to gender disparities in education is socio-cultural norms and attitudes. In many societies, traditional beliefs about gender roles can limit educational opportunities for girls. For instance, cultural norms often prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates among female students (Miske & Kanno, 2005). Gender biases rooted in societal expectations can also affect parental attitudes towards investing in daughters' education, often viewing it as less valuable compared to sons' education (UNESCO, 2015).

2. Educational Infrastructure and Accessibility

The availability and quality of educational

infrastructure significantly impact gender disparities. In many regions, particularly rural areas, the lack of accessible and safe schools can disproportionately affect girls. School closures, long distances to educational institutions, and inadequate facilities can discourage girls from attending school (World Bank, 2017). Moreover, gender-specific challenges such as inadequate sanitation facilities in schools can impact girls' school attendance and performance (Sommer, 2013).

3. Institutional and Policy Constraints

Institutional and policy constraints also contribute to gender disparities in education. In some contexts, there may be insufficient policies or inadequate implementation of existing policies aimed at promoting gender equity in education. For example, lack of gender-sensitive curricula and teaching materials can perpetuate stereotypes and limit girls' engagement in education (Arnot et al., 1999). Additionally, policies that fail to address the specific needs of female students, such as provisions for maternity leave or support for pregnant students, can lead to higher dropout rates among girls (Lloyd & Mensch, 2018).

4. Violence and Safety Concerns

Violence and safety concerns are critical factors impacting gender disparities in education. Girls are often at higher risk of experiencing violence, including sexual harassment and abuse, in and around educational settings (UNICEF, 2014). This threat can deter girls from attending school or lead to higher dropout rates. The fear of violence and the lack of protective measures in schools contribute to gender inequities in education (Yamano & Jayne, 2014).

5. Health-Related Issues

Health-related issues, including menstrual hygiene management and reproductive health, can affect girls' educational outcomes. Inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products and sanitary facilities can lead to school absenteeism among girls (Sommer et al., 2016). Additionally, health issues related to early pregnancy can significantly impact girls' ability to continue their education (Gage, 2017).

Impact of Education on Family Development

Education plays a crucial role in shaping family development and overall well-being. It influences various dimensions of family life,

including economic stability, health, and social cohesion. This section explores how education impacts family development, drawing on empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives.

Economic Impact: Education significantly affects the economic stability of families. Higher educational attainment is associated with improved employment prospects and higher income levels. According to Becker (1993), human capital theory suggests that education enhances individuals' productivity and earning potential. As a result, families with higher levels of educational attainment experience increased economic stability, which contributes to their overall development. Research by Schuller et al. (2004) supports this view, highlighting that educated individuals are more likely to secure better-paying jobs and provide a higher standard of living for their families.

Moreover, education contributes to economic development at the community level. A study by Woessmann and West (2006) found that educational attainment is positively correlated with economic growth, as it fosters a more skilled workforce and stimulates innovation. This, in turn, benefits families by creating more opportunities for economic advancement and stability.

Health Impact: Education also has a profound effect on family health outcomes. Educated individuals tend to have better health knowledge and practices, which translates into healthier family environments. Cutler and Lleras-Muney (2006) found that higher educational levels are associated with healthier lifestyles, including better nutrition and access to healthcare services. This improved health literacy helps families make informed decisions about health and wellness, reducing the prevalence of preventable diseases and enhancing overall quality of life.

Furthermore, education is linked to reduced healthcare costs. A study by Grossman (1972) demonstrated that educated individuals are more likely to engage in preventive health behaviors and seek medical care when needed, leading to fewer health-related expenditures and improved family well-being.

Social Impact: Education also influences social cohesion and family dynamics. Educated individuals often have more social capital, which includes networks of support and resources.

Coleman in Duru and Okwu (2021) emphasized that social capital, facilitated by education, strengthens family relationships and community bonds. Educated parents are better equipped to provide support and guidance to their children, fostering positive family environments and enhancing children's educational outcomes (Hoxworth, 2006).

Additionally, education promotes gender equality within families. Research by Dreze and Sen (2002) highlights that increased educational opportunities for women contribute to greater gender equality and empowerment. Educated women are more likely to participate in decision-making processes and contribute to family income, leading to improved family dynamics and development.

Impact of Educational Disparities on Family Sustainable Development

Educational disparities, particularly those rooted in gender, significantly impact family sustainable development. Understanding this relationship requires an examination of how unequal educational opportunities affect various dimensions of family well-being and development.

Educational Disparities and Family Economic Stability: Educational attainment is closely linked to economic stability within families. Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of education tend to have better job prospects and higher earning potential. Gender disparities in education can thus lead to unequal economic opportunities, affecting families' financial stability. For instance, girls' limited access to education often translates into lower income levels and less economic security for women and their families (World Bank, 2018). This economic inequality can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit families' capacity to invest in health, education, and other essential services.

Impact on Health and Well-being: Educational attainment also influences health outcomes. Studies have shown that higher education levels are associated with better health and well-being. Gender disparities in education can thus exacerbate health inequities within families. For example, women with limited educational opportunities are less likely to access healthcare resources and make informed health decisions,

which can negatively affect their families' overall health (Marmot, 2015). Moreover, the stress associated with economic insecurity and limited education can contribute to poorer mental health among family members.

Influence on Family Dynamics and Child Development: Educational disparities impact family dynamics and child development. Families with lower educational attainment often face challenges in providing quality educational support for their children. When educational opportunities are skewed by gender, it can lead to reduced educational support for girls, perpetuating the cycle of inequality. Children from families with lower educational levels are more likely to experience developmental delays and academic difficulties, which can affect their long-term educational and professional outcomes (Duncan et al., 2017). Conversely, families where both genders have equal educational opportunities tend to invest more in their children's education, promoting better developmental outcomes and breaking the cycle of poverty.

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

Addressing educational disparities requires targeted policies that promote gender equality in education. Strategies such as increasing access to quality education for girls, implementing scholarship programs, and creating supportive learning environments can help mitigate these disparities (UNESCO, 2014). Furthermore, policies that support family economic stability and access to healthcare can enhance the positive impacts of education on family development.

Gender Issues of Education Opportunity and the Achievement of Family Sustainable Development

Gender disparities in educational opportunities have long been a significant concern in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. These disparities not only impede individual development but also have far-reaching implications for the achievement of sustainable family development. Education is widely recognized as a key driver of social and economic progress, yet gender-based inequalities continue to hinder its potential to contribute to the holistic development of families and

communities (UNESCO, 2015).

In Nigeria, gender disparities in education manifest in various forms, including unequal access to education, differences in enrolment rates, and variations in academic achievement between males and females. Several socio-cultural factors contribute to these disparities. For instance, traditional gender roles often prioritize boys' education over girls', particularly in rural areas where early marriage and domestic responsibilities may limit girls' educational opportunities (Okojie, 2016). This entrenched gender bias is exacerbated by economic constraints, where limited resources force families to choose which children to educate, often at the expense of daughters (Adebayo & Amoo, 2020).

These gender disparities have profound implications for sustainable development. Education is a critical tool for empowering individuals, particularly women, to participate fully in economic, social, and political life. When girls are denied educational opportunities, they are more likely to experience poverty, poor health, and limited employment prospects, all of which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality within families and communities (Nwosu, 2017). Consequently, gender disparities in education undermine efforts to achieve sustainable family development, which relies on the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among all family members.

The achievement of sustainable family development is closely linked to the educational attainment of all family members, particularly women. Educated women are more likely to have smaller, healthier families and to invest in the education of their children, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty (Schultz, 2016). Furthermore, education enhances women's decision-making power within the household, leading to better health and nutrition outcomes for their families (World Bank, 2018). This, in turn, contributes to the overall well-being and stability of families, which is essential for sustainable development.

However, the persistence of gender disparities in education limits the potential for families to achieve these benefits. In Nigeria, the educational gap between men and women has contributed to gender imbalances in the labour market, with women often relegated to low-

paying, informal sector jobs (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2018). This economic marginalization weakens the financial stability of families and restricts their ability to invest in the future, whether through savings, education, or other means. Therefore, addressing gender disparities in education is crucial not only for individual empowerment but also for the sustainable development of families and communities as a whole.

To effectively address the gender issues that hinder educational opportunities and sustainable family development, it is essential to implement policies that promote gender equity in education. This includes eliminating financial barriers to education, such as school fees, and providing targeted scholarships and incentives for girls to attend and complete school (Fapohunda, 2020). Additionally, community-based initiatives that challenge traditional gender norms and promote the value of girls' education can play a vital role in shifting attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender disparities (Umar, 2019). Furthermore, improving the quality of education is critical to ensuring that all children, regardless of gender, have access to meaningful learning experiences that prepare them for the challenges of the future. This requires investments in teacher training, curriculum development, and school infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas (UNICEF, 2020). By addressing both access and quality issues, Nigeria can move closer to achieving gender equity in education, which is essential for the sustainable development of families and society at large.

Gender disparities in education remain a significant barrier to achieving sustainable family development in Nigeria. These disparities are rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and systemic inequalities that limit educational opportunities for girls and women. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy interventions, community engagement, and investments in education. By promoting gender equity in education, Nigeria can empower women, enhance family well-being, and contribute to the broader goals of sustainable development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender inequities in education not

only hinder individual potential but also undermine the broader goals of family and community well-being. Disparities are deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, and policy inefficiencies, which collectively perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit the progress of sustainable development. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that includes policy reform, community engagement, and targeted interventions aimed at leveling the educational playing field for all genders. By improving access to quality education for girls and boys alike, we can empower families and communities to break free from the constraints of gender bias, leading to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. Ultimately, this study underscores the critical importance of rethinking gender issues in education as a foundational step toward achieving lasting family sustainability and national development in Nigeria. It calls for immediate action from policymakers, educators, and community leaders to implement inclusive strategies that will ensure equal educational opportunities for every child, thereby fostering a more just and prosperous society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. The Nigerian government should prioritize the development and implementation of gender-sensitive educational policies that ensure equal access to education for both boys and girls, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
2. Educational institutions should integrate gender awareness programs into their curricula, aiming to challenge and change the socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender disparities in education.
3. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should collaborate with local communities to promote awareness and advocacy campaigns that emphasize the importance of educating all children, regardless of gender, as a means to achieve sustainable family development.
4. Policy-makers should design and enforce affirmative action policies that provide additional support, such as scholarships and mentorship programs, to girls and women to help bridge the educational gap and enhance their participation in all levels of education.
5. Parents and guardians should be encouraged and supported to prioritize the education of all their children, with a focus on breaking down traditional gender roles that limit girls' access to educational opportunities.
6. Research institutions should conduct further studies on the impact of gender disparities in education on family and community development, ensuring that findings inform policy and practice.
7. Community leaders should actively promote gender equity in education by challenging harmful cultural practices and encouraging inclusive attitudes towards the education of both boys and girls.
8. International development partners should provide technical and financial assistance to support national and local initiatives aimed at closing the gender gap in education, ensuring that these efforts contribute to broader sustainable development goals.

References

- Adamu, B. (2021). Gender Disparities in educational access and achievement in Nigeria. *African Journal of Education*, 15(4), 221-237.
- Adebayo, A. A., & Amoo, E. O. (2020). Gender and education in Nigeria: Analysis of trends, challenges, and implications for sustainable development. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(3), 213-230.
- Adeniran, A. & Oladipo, S. (2020). Gender Disparity in Education: An Analysis of Gender Differences in Academic Achievement. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 10(2), 115-130.
- Akinpelu, O. (2021). Gender Disparities in Education in Nigeria: Current Trends and Challenges. *Journal of Education and Social Policy*, 8(2), 45-58.
- Arnot, M., David, M., & Weiner, G. (2019). *A political economy of education: the gendered dimensions of the curriculum*. Routledge.

- Duncan, G. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K. (2017). Economic deprivation and early childhood development. *Child Development*, 68(2), 296-309.
- Duru, S., & Okwu, D. (2021). Bridging the gender gap in education: policy implications for Nigeria. *African Educational Review*, 13(1), 120-135.
- Eze, E. (2022). Socio-cultural barriers to female education in Nigeria: a critical review. *International Journal of Gender Studies*, 9(3), 78-91.
- Fapohunda, T. M. (2020). Gender inequality in education and economic development in Nigeria. *African Development Review*, 32(4), 543-555.
- Gage, A. J. (2017). The effects of schooling on teenage pregnancy: a review of the evidence. *Studies in Family Planning*, 38(2), 121-139.
- Jensen, R. (2010). Economic incentives and gender gaps in education: evidence from India. *Journal of Development Economics*, 94(2), 264-276.
- Lloyd, C. B., & Mensch, B. S. (2018). Marriage and childbirth as factors in school exit: an Analysis of DHS data. *Economics of Education Review*, 27(3), 417-428.
- Marmot, M. (2015). Social determinants of health inequalities. *The Lancet*, 365(9464), 1099-1104.
- Miske, S., & Kanno, M. (2015). Education and gender inequality: the case of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Education Review*, 49(4), 469-488.
- Nwosu, E. O. (2017). The impact of gender inequality on economic growth in Nigeria. *International Journal of Economics and Finance*, 9(7), 47-60.
- Ogunyemi, M., & Ogunyemi, O. (2023). Addressing gender-based violence in schools: a pathway to improved female educational outcomes in Nigeria. *Journal of Gender and Development*, 16(4), 97-110.
- Ogunyemi, S. (2019). Historical perspectives on gender and education in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Historical Studies*, 22(1), 77-89.
- Okojie, C. E. (2016). Gender and education in Nigeria: The role of social norms. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 11(8), 123-133.
- Olaniyan, D. A., & Okemakinde, T. (2018). Human capital theory: implications for educational development. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 24(2), 157-162.
- Pritchett, L. (2014). *Gender disparities and the educational experience*. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3164.
- Schultz, T. P. (2016). The role of education in economic development: A human capital perspective. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 25(4), 177-200.
- Smith, J. (2020). The impact of gender inequality in education on family economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Development Studies Quarterly*, 24(1), 56-70.
- Sommer, M. (2013). *Menstrual hygiene management in schools: insights from a global study*. WaterAid.
- Sommer, M., Schmitt, M. L., Clatworthy, D., & Dinkel, H. (2016). Menstrual hygiene Management and Girls' Education: a review of the literature. *International Journal Educational Development*, 48(2), 127-141.
- Umar, A. S. (2019). Challenging gender norms through education: the Nigerian experience. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(2), 89-104.
- UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all 2000-2015: achievements and challenges*. UNESCO Publishing.

- UNESCO. (2019). *Education for sustainable development: goals and challenges. UNESCO Education Reports.*
- UNICEF. (2014). *The state of the world's children 2014: nutrition.* UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2020). *The state of the world's children 2019: children, food, and nutrition.* UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2022). *Education Statistics in Nigeria.* Retrieved from www.unicef.org/nigeria/education
- United Nations. (2021). *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021.* United Nations.
- World Bank. (2017). *World development report 2018: learning to realize education's promise.* World Bank.
- World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: learning to realize education's promise.* The World Bank.
- Yamano, T., & Jayne, T. S. (2014). Measuring the Impact of Education on Female Labor Market Participation and Earnings. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 52(4), 781-804.