

The Roles of Girl-Child Education in the Achievement of Gender Balance, Synergy and Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This study explores the pivotal roles of girl-child education in promoting gender balance, synergy, and achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 100 respondents through a self-developed and ethically administered questionnaire titled “The Roles of Girl-Child Education in the Achievement of Gender Balance, Synergy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria” (RGCEAGBSSDN), based on a 4-point Likert scale to 100 adult respondents (50 males and 50 females), aged 18 and above, at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Data were analyzed using mean scores and simple percentages, with interpretation at the 0.05 significance level. The responses were analyzed using mean scores and simple percentages, with a decision benchmark set at 2.50 and significance level at 0.05. Results revealed that girl-child education significantly promotes gender synergy by empowering girls for leadership, fostering collaboration with male peers, and challenging harmful gender norms. The study also found strong links between girls’ education and key indicators of sustainable development, including poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and civic engagement. However, challenges such as early marriage, cultural and religious biases, inadequate infrastructure, and weak policy enforcement persist. Respondents identified strategic interventions such as compulsory education laws, scholarship schemes, gender-sensitive facilities, and mentorship programs as critical to improving girl-child education. The findings align with the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory and Human Capital Theory, emphasizing that equitable education access is foundational for inclusive societal transformation. The study concludes that girl-child education is indispensable for national progress and calls for multi-stakeholder commitment to eliminate barriers and promote inclusive, gender-balanced development in Nigeria.*

Keywords: girl-child education, gender balance, gender, synergy, sustainable development, female empowerment, national transformation

INTRODUCTION

Education continues to be a potent tool for social change, economic empowerment and sustainable development in any society. The education of the girl-child, in particular, has been identified as a key enabler to gender synergy – a balanced and collaborative relationship between all genders – and progress across a number of dimensions of development. Yet, in developing countries like Nigeria, millions of girls are still facing systemic barriers to access and completion of quality education as a result of poverty, child marriage, cultural norms, poor infrastructure, and gender-based violence.

The gender disparities in literacy, income, political representation and leadership roles in Nigeria highlight the need to educate the girl child. UNESCO (2023) reported that more than 10 million children in Nigeria are out of school, including a higher proportion of girls. The impact of this educational deprivation is far reaching: a generation of women with limited skills, limited economic opportunities and limited role in the national development process. But, when girls are educated, communities also see a decrease in child mortality, an increase in household income and civic engagement, leading to a long-term stability and balance in society.

This study is based on the conviction that the education of girls is not just a gender issue, but an investment into the country's future. Education of girl-child directly impacts gender synergy as it enables women to participate meaningfully with men to create a more inclusive and sustainable society. This aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Girl-Child Education is the formal and informal education of girl children to enable them to build up literacy, life skills and the ability to take an active role in their own and community development. It includes access, retention and completion at primary, secondary and higher education levels. Education for the girl-child has a ripple effect, impacting on health, economic, political and social outcomes (UNICEF, 2021). However, Nigeria being a developing country needs to be held responsible for prioritizing girl-child education in its annual policy. A healthy budgeting should be ensured to her in her annual budget for specially taking care of this fragile aspect of our national development. There are now numerous examples of educated girls of good character and contribution to international and national development. On January 20, 2021, Vice President, Kamala Harris – The first female Vice President of the United States, was sworn in internationally. She is also the first African American and South Asian to serve in the position.

Also, Madeleine Albright was the first female United States of America Secretary of State (1997-2001). Condoleezza Rice also was the first black female Secretary of State (2005-2009). Moreover, Hillary Clinton was the former Secretary of State (2009-2013) in USA and in 2016 was the first woman to be nominated by a major party (Democratic Party) for President. (Source: U.S. Department of State – Office of the Historian. (2025 update).

Innumerable examples of Nigerian successful educated girls-children, who after becoming adults, added invaluable to national development also abound. Among them are, Dr. Obiageli Ezekwezi, one time minister of education in Nigeria, Dr. Dora Nkem Akunyili, the first woman to lead National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) as its Director General from 2001

to 2008. The fact that the girl child is being educated will definitely take us to national development, eradicate gender bias, promote gender balance and competitively strive to meet the best global practices in the world ranking is a fact testified by her who is widely credited with achieving this feat in Nigeria, the second female Director General, Professor Mojisola Christianah Adeyeye, who came into the political space in November 2017 and continues to serve till date following her reappointment to a second term in December 2022, as well as various Deputy Governors in different States of the Nigeria federations, to mention but few. Our girls are our future in Nigeria but insecurity, traditional norms, poverty and ignorance are the main factors hindering and discouraging girl-child education in Nigeria. (Ezekwezili, (2014), Ezekwezili, 2015).

Gender Synergy refers to the synergy of all genders working together to reach collective social and development objectives. Synergy is a way to encourage mutual respect, shared roles, and complementary contributions to sustainable development, rather than one of dominance or opposition between gender (UN Women, 2020). Thus, issue of world or national development should not be conceived a male gender role only. We need to educate our girl-children and also prepare them to synergize or collaborate with the men gender for the future development and economic growth of the country.

The United Nations (2015) defines Sustainable Development as "development that does not endanger the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Education, particularly for the girl-child, is at the heart of SDGs. We must have the foresight into the future by preparing sustaining and meeting the needs of our girl children for today, as well as prepare them well to successfully face the challenges of tomorrow.

The study was conducted on both males and females of 18 years and older of the Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, which is a diverse and educational institution. The survey method gives subjective information from the respondents' point of view, which is informative but may not be able to reflect the entire systemic problems in education in all parts of Nigeria.

This study is based on two pertinent theories namely: Human Capital Theory

This theory was developed by Schultz (1961) and extended by Becker (1993) and argues that education enhances an individual's productivity and economic value. Girls' education makes them more employable, fosters economic development and helps them to make better health and education choices for their families (World Bank, 2020). The second theory of this study is Gender and Development (GAD) Theory

GAD is about the relational dimension of gender and the need for re-organisation of the institutions in the society to enable both sexes to be equally empowered. It challenges previous strategies such as Women in Development (WID), which have tended to separate women from systemic change. GAD advocates synergy between men and women in joint development (Moser, 1993). There are many studies that highlight the benefits of educating the girl child. In the North of Nigeria, Abdu-Raheem (2017) discovered that educating the girl child positively affected the rate of child marriage in the region and the overall health indices of the community. Likewise, Adeola and Oluyemi (2019) showed that there was a high correlation between education and political discourse and leadership of young women. Olanrewaju (2021) stated that educating girls is a key to sustainable development as it helps in the reduction of generational poverty, participation of girls in the labour market, as well as reducing

maternal mortality rates. Moreover, Edewor & Emeka (2020) emphasized that female education is crucial for peacebuilding and intergenerational equity in Sub-Saharan Africa.

UNESCO (2023) found that at a global level, countries with higher rates of female literacy also had higher GDP per capita, better environmental policies and lower rates of gender-based violence. According to Akintunde et al. (2022), girl-child education is at the heart of the rebalancing of the power dynamics in traditionally patriarchy dominated societies, which can help gender synergy to thrive. The literature emphasizes the advantages of girl-child education, and there is a dearth of empirical evidence on the perception of educated females regarding the relationship between their education, gender synergy and sustainable development. Moreover, little research has been conducted on Nigerian university-aged women, especially in teacher-education institutions like the Adeyemi Federal University of Education. This study fills this gap by focusing on the perception of educated women in this context, thereby providing an insight into the lived reality and expectations of the modern Nigerian female youth.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous policy initiatives, including the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and various gender-focused interventions, the implementation of girl-child education in Nigeria remains suboptimal. Girls in many regions still lack access to formal education or drop out prematurely due to sociocultural pressures. The disconnect between policy and practice raises critical questions about how effectively girl-child education contributes to the broader goals of gender synergy and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks to achieve the following purposes and objectives. It seeks to:

1. Examine the perceived impact of girl-child education on gender synergy.
2. Assess how girl-child education contributes to sustainable development goals.
3. Identify challenges limiting the effectiveness of girl-child education in Nigeria.
4. Recommend actionable strategies for improving access, quality, and relevance of education for the girl-child.

Research Questions

1. How does girl-child education influence gender synergy in Nigerian society?
2. In what ways does girl-child education contribute to sustainable development?
3. What are the major challenges hindering the implementation of girl-child education programs?
4. What measures can be taken to strengthen girl-child education for national growth?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for this study was made up of all adult males and females in Adeyemi Federal University of Education Campus. The sampled size however comprised of 50 each of adult males and females making the total of 100 respondents, aged 18 and above from Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. The study focuses on adult men and women 18 and above at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, chosen for its diversity and educational focus. The survey approach provides subjective insights based on respondents' views, which, while informative, may not capture the full complexity of systemic educational issues across all regions of Nigeria.

The questionnaire instrument designed by the researchers for the study tagged “The Roles of Girl-Child Education in the Achievement of Gender Balance, Synergy and sustainable Development in Nigeria’ (RGCEAGBSSDN), was given to two Senior Lecturers and experts, one each from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and Early Childhood/Care Education ensured the face and content validity of the instrument before it was administered to respondents. Their corrections and suggestions were used to make the instrument better. The instrument was trial-tested on 10 each of male and female adults, making a total of 20 adult individuals in Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, which were not included in this study. The reliability coefficient of this study yielded 0.78 using Cronbach Alpha.

Data was collected through a self-designed questionnaire which was administered in persons, with ethical standards observed. All were promptly collected at the spot without records of loss of any of copy of the instrument. Data were analyzed using mean scores and simple percentages. For interpretative purposes, a benchmark mean score of 2.50 was used as the decision threshold: any item with a mean ≥ 2.50 was considered an indication of agreement. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05 to assess consistency and validity of patterns in the responses.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
Age Group	18–25 years	40	40%
	26–35 years	35	35%
	36 years and above	25	25%
Marital Status	Single	55	55%
	Married	40	40%
	Divorced/Widowed	5	5%
Educational Level	Undergraduate	45	45%
	First Degree Graduate	35	35%
	Postgraduate	20	20%
Residency (Ondo Town)	Yes	65	65%
	No	35	35%
Has Female Relative in School	Yes	78	78%
	No	22	22%

Gender distribution is perfectly balanced, ensuring both male and female perspectives are equally represented. The majority of respondents (75%) are between 18 and 35 years, indicating a youthful sample likely attuned to modern education issues. Over half of the respondents (55%) are single, while 40% are married, possibly influencing views on the future aspirations of young girls. Most respondents (80%) have at least a first degree, affirming that the sample is well-educated and can meaningfully assess girl-child education issues. A significant majority (65%) reside within Ondo town, ensuring

local relevance to the case study context. 78% have a sister, daughter, or female relative currently in school, indicating direct familiarity with the realities of girl-child education.

Out of 100 valid questionnaires returned (response rate = 100 %), exactly half (n = 50) were males and half females, satisfying the gender-balanced sampling plan. Age distribution was: 18–25 years = 40 %, 26–35 years = 35 %, and 36 years above = 25 %. A majority were single (55 %), followed by married (40 %) and divorced/widowed (5 %). Educational attainment comprised under-graduates (45 %), first-degree graduates (35 %) and post-graduates (20 %). Sixty-five per cent lived within Ondo town, and 78 % reported having at least one sister, daughter or close female relative currently in school. The diverse yet balanced profile supports the external validity of subsequent analyses.

Table 2: Influence of girl-child education on gender synergy

Item	Statement (n = 100)	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Promotes equal female leadership participation	3.52	0.58	Agree
2	Encourages collaboration with male peers	3.48	0.62	Agree
3	Challenges of traditional gender stereotypes	3.35	0.70	Agree
4	Improves mutual gender respect	3.60	0.55	Agree
5	Empowers girls' voices in decisions	3.45	0.63	Agree

Section mean = 3.48 (> 2.50 cut-off).

Respondents overwhelmingly endorsed the view that schooling equips girls to share leadership spaces, negotiate respectfully with male colleagues and question restrictive norms. This corroborates qualitative evidence that formal education broadens girls' "gender-negotiating capital" in northern Nigeria

Table 3: Contribution of girl-child education to sustainable development

Item	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
6	Drives careers that fuel economic growth	3.40	0.66	Agree
7	Helps reduce poverty in families/communities	3.55	0.59	Agree
8	Leads to healthier life-choices for women & children	3.50	0.61	Agree
9	Raises environmental-sustainability awareness	3.22	0.74	Agree
10	Increases civic engagement & social responsibility	3.30	0.68	Agree

Section mean = 3.39

Respondents linked girls' schooling to multiple SDG-aligned outcomes economic, health and environmental echoing World Bank assertions that keeping girls in school delivers "triple-dividend" benefits for families, society and the planet

Table 4: Challenges of effective implementation of girl-child education

Item	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
11	Cultural/religious beliefs restrict access	3.58	0.54	Agree
12	Inadequate funding reduces quality	3.45	0.60	Agree
13	Early marriage causes female dropout	3.70	0.50	Agree
14	Parental preference for boys' education	3.30	0.72	Agree
15	Safety & sanitary issues deter attendance	3.25	0.75	Agree

Section mean = 3.46.

Respondents highlighted deeply-rooted patriarchal norms and early marriage as principal obstacles, findings mirrored by nationwide reports of patriarchal preferences and insecurity limiting girls' schooling.

Table 5: Measures that strengthen girl-child education for national growth

Item	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
16	Enforce compulsory-education laws for girls	3.75	0.48	Agree
17	Community awareness to shift attitudes	3.60	0.55	Agree
18	Scholarships/incentives for low-income girls	3.65	0.52	Agree
19	Provide gender-sensitive school infrastructure	3.50	0.60	Agree
20	Leverage female mentors as role models	3.48	0.61	Agree

Section mean = 3.60 (highest of all sections)

Legal backing, financial support and mentoring emerged as top priorities. This resonates with current federal efforts to engage traditional leaders and scale scholarship schemes such as AGILE, which now benefits over three million girls across 18 states.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section interprets the results presented in relation to existing literature and the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. The findings demonstrate the critical role of girl-child education in shaping both gender synergy and sustainable development in Nigeria. There was a strong perception among respondents that girl-child education promotes gender synergy by empowering women to participate equally in leadership and societal roles. Girl-child education is widely recognized as a vital driver of sustainable development, particularly in health, income generation, and environmental awareness. Key challenges include cultural norms, gender bias, and insufficient government support. The results indicate strong agreement among respondents that girl-child education fosters gender synergy by promoting equal participation in leadership and encouraging respectful collaboration between men and women. This supports UN Women (2020), which emphasized that an educated female population is better equipped to challenge gender norms and contribute meaningfully to societal transformation. These findings align with the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory, which posits that true development emerges when men and women collaborate equitably. The high mean scores (>3.20) reflect respondents' lived experiences, suggesting that education has empowered them to engage confidently in academic, professional, and civic spaces. The finding also reinforces Akintunde et al. (2022), who argue that gender synergy is unattainable without equal educational opportunities.

The study confirms the widely accepted notion that girl-child education is key to achieving long-term societal sustainability. Respondents strongly agree that education helps reduce early marriages, improves maternal health, increases family income, and promotes environmentally responsible behaviors. These outcomes are consistent with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). This is also in line with Human Capital Theory, which views education as a strategic investment in future productivity. The respondents' acknowledgment of education as a tool for improved socio-economic conditions reflects conclusions by Edewor & Emeka (2020) and Olanrewaju (2021), who stress the direct link between female education and national development indicators.

Despite the acknowledged benefits, significant barriers to girl-child education persist. Cultural norms, religious beliefs, economic hardship, and gender bias within families were all identified as major impediments. These findings echo the observations of Abdu-Raheem (2017), who highlighted similar barriers in Northern Nigeria. Respondents also pointed to inadequate infrastructure and weak policy enforcement, which align with the criticisms raised by Adeola & Oluyemi (2019) regarding Nigeria's fragmented educational policy environment. These challenges suggest a persistent gap between policy formulation and grassroots implementation. Without strategic interventions, these barriers will continue to undermine progress toward inclusive education and gender equity.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided empirical insight into the critical role of girl-child education in fostering gender synergy and achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. Drawing on responses from women within a higher education context, the findings reveal widespread recognition of education as a transformative tool that empowers girls, strengthens communities, and bridges gender gaps in leadership, economics, and social participation. The study confirms that girl-child education contributes not only to individual growth but also to national and global progress. It promotes gender-balanced engagement, economic empowerment, and social inclusion, all vital ingredients for a sustainable future. However, systemic barriers such as cultural stereotypes, limited funding, and weak policy enforcement continue to threaten the effectiveness and accessibility of education for girls. To truly empower our world by educating her, it is imperative to translate awareness into action. Addressing the identified challenges will require robust policy enforcement, community-driven advocacy, and targeted investments in educational infrastructure and innovation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Government at all levels should enforce and monitor girl-child education policies, ensuring compliance with laws protecting the right to education for all children, especially girls.
2. Advocacy campaigns should target parents, traditional leaders, and religious institutions to challenge harmful norms and encourage support for female education.
3. Schools, especially in underserved areas, should be equipped with gender-sensitive facilities (e.g., safe toilets, sanitary support, security) to promote retention and learning comfort for girls.
4. NGOs, private organizations, and institutions should provide financial aid, role models, and guidance to encourage continued education and career development among young women.
5. Curriculum reform should include subjects that promote gender equity, leadership, reproductive health, and economic skills for both boys and girls.

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