

Gender Disparities in the Enrollment and Attainment of Primary Education Among Adolescents in Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State

A. A Onipede and B. K Akilade

Department of Social Science Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

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Abstract: *The study investigated gender disparities in the enrollment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State, Nigeria. This study examines the extent of these disparities, identifying key socio-economic, cultural, and policy-related factors that contribute to lower enrollment and completion rates among girls compared to boys. This study employed descriptive research of the survey type to investigate gender disparities in enrollment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government. The population of this study consisted of primary school students within Ado Local Government. The sample for the study comprised 200 respondents selected from 10 primary schools from Ado Local Government using simple random sampling technique. Stratified sampling technique was used to select Twenty students from each school Ado Local Government of Ekiti State. The instrument used to collect data was Titled; Gender Disparities in the Enrollment and Attainment of Primary Education among Adolescents (GDEAPEA). To ascertain the validity of the instrument, copies of the questionnaire were given to experts in Test and Measurement in the Faculty of Education Ekiti State University to ensure the face and content validity. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means. It was revealed from the findings that gender disparities exists in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State. The findings also revealed that the factors contributing to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government ranges from household poverty, long distances to school, cost of schooling, Parental attitudes towards education and Existing government policies. Based on the findings it was recommended that equal opportunities should be given to both male and female students when considering the enrollment ratio. It was also recommended that there should be poverty alleviation programmes for parents and schools should be cited close to residential for ease access*

Keywords: gender disparitiesm enrollment, primary education, adolescents, ado local government area, Ekiti state

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic human right recognized around the world. It is one of the most powerful tools for driving development, reducing poverty, and improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability. Education consistently leads to higher incomes and plays a crucial role in promoting fairness and inclusion (Babatunde, Omoniwa, & Ukemenam, 2019). On an individual level, education seems to increase a person's chances of getting a job, earning a better income, staying healthy, and escaping poverty. According to the World Bank (2011), each additional year of schooling results in a 9% increase in hourly wages worldwide. In other words, more education typically means higher pay. At the societal level, education fuels long-term economic growth, encourages innovation, strengthens public institutions, and helps build social unity. It also plays a key role in tackling climate change by promoting behavior change and building skills needed for green economies (World Bank, 2011).

However, gender inequality in education remains a major issue in many parts of Nigeria—especially in rural areas like Ado Local Government in Ekiti State. Girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled in or complete primary school, due to a mix of economic, cultural, and policy-related challenges. This gender gap is a serious obstacle to achieving inclusive and equitable education for all (UNESCO, 2021). Even though education is a right, girls in rural communities often face unique barriers that keep them out of school or cause them to drop out early. As a result, they are more likely to fall behind their male peers in terms of educational achievement (Omoeva & Hatch, 2018).

This study focuses on enrolment and attainment in primary education—key indicators of educational progress and gender equality. Enrolment refers to the number of children registered in primary school, while attainment means successfully completing primary school. In Ado Local Government, statistics show a significant gender gap: fewer girls than boys are enrolled in and complete primary education (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This highlights the urgent need for targeted policies and programs that give both girls and boys equal opportunities to access and finish primary school.

One of the major reasons for gender inequality in education is socio-economic status. In Ado Local Government, many families struggle financially and often choose to educate boys over girls. Boys are usually seen as future providers, so parents are more willing to spend limited resources on their education. In contrast, girls are often expected to stay home, help with household chores, or get married early (Alabi & Alabi, 2014). A parent's level of education also matters—a more educated parent is generally more likely to support the education of both sons and daughters (Aslam & Kingdon, 2008). The additional costs of schooling, like buying uniforms, books, and paying for transport, tend to hit girls harder, further limiting their chances of getting an education.

Cultural and social norms tied to gender roles also play a big part in creating these disparities. In many Nigerian communities, including Ado Local Government, traditional beliefs often place women in domestic roles. This mindset encourages early marriage and childbearing, causing many girls to leave school during adolescence (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019). There's also a widespread belief that educating girls doesn't benefit the family in the long run since girls are expected to marry and become part of another household. This reduces the motivation for families to invest in girls' education (World Bank, 2018).

Another significant factor is the state of educational infrastructure. In some areas of Ado Local Government, schools are far from home, which poses a safety risk for girls and restricts their movement due to social expectations (Ogundele, 2015). Schools that lack basic gender-sensitive facilities—like separate toilets—can make it uncomfortable or even unsafe for girls to attend, especially during puberty. These challenges often lead to more absences and higher dropout rates for girls, particularly in rural areas (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Finally, the quality of education matters too. Teachers who are not trained to recognize and address gender issues may unknowingly reinforce harmful stereotypes. This can discourage girls, lower their confidence, and hurt their academic performance (Dunne & Leach, 2005).

The Nigerian government has introduced several policies to promote education for all, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program. This policy promises free and compulsory education for all children. However, in practice, its success in narrowing gender gaps in places like Ado Local Government has been inconsistent (Akinbote, 2021). Problems like insufficient funding, poor school infrastructure, and resistance from some communities—especially toward girls' education—have slowed down progress. Although NGOs and international organizations have launched programs to improve access to education for girls, their impact has been limited without strong local support and proper enforcement of government policies (Omoeva & Hatch, 2018).

Gender inequality in school enrolment and achievement is shaped by a mix of economic, cultural, and institutional barriers, with girls in rural areas like Ado Local Government being especially affected. Poverty is one of the biggest challenges. In families with very limited income, parents are often forced to choose which children can go to school. Boys are usually favored because they're seen as future providers, while girls are expected to help at home or prepare for early marriage. This mindset results in higher school enrolment and completion rates for boys, and lower ones for girls. Research shows that in poor communities, the cost of education—including school uniforms, books, and transport—can be too much for families. Since girls are often seen as less "worth" investing in because they will marry and move into another household, they are the first to be left out (Alabi & Alabi, 2014). This economic hardship continues to widen the gap in educational access between boys and girls.

Cultural beliefs and gender roles also play a major role in limiting girls' education. In many areas of Ado Local Government, traditional views still dominate how people think about education. Boys are seen as future leaders and heads of households, while girls are expected to take on domestic roles. These expectations mean that girls often face restrictions that prevent them from completing school. In many cases, girls are taken out of school when they reach puberty to prepare for marriage, especially in rural communities. There's also a widespread belief that educating girls delays marriage, which some families see as a problem (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019). This early withdrawal from school limits girls' personal and professional growth, and it helps maintain a cycle of poverty. Women with less education are more likely to have fewer job opportunities and are less likely to support their own daughters' education, continuing the pattern from one generation to the next (World Bank, 2018).

In rural areas like Ado Local Government, poor educational infrastructure continues to play a significant role in widening gender gaps in education. Many schools are located far from students' homes, which creates safety concerns—especially for girls. Cultural norms often restrict girls' movement, and parents may hesitate to let their daughters travel long distances to school, particularly when transportation is unreliable or unsafe.

Another major issue is the lack of gender-sensitive facilities in schools. Many do not have separate toilets for boys and girls, which becomes a serious concern once girls reach puberty. Without proper sanitation facilities, girls are more likely to miss school during their menstrual periods. Over time, this leads to frequent absenteeism and an increased risk of dropping out. Research shows that these infrastructure gaps impact girls more severely than boys, making it harder for them to stay in school and complete their education (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

Classroom dynamics also contribute to the problem. Teachers often—knowingly or not—reinforce traditional gender roles by giving boys more attention, encouraging them to lead and participate more actively in class. Meanwhile, girls are sometimes overlooked or given less encouragement, which can cause them to take a back seat in their own education. This imbalance not only affects girls' academic performance but also undermines their confidence and motivation to succeed. Many teachers lack the training to recognize and challenge these biases, which allows the problem to continue unchecked. As a result, girls may feel less valued in the classroom, which can damage their self-esteem and limit their academic progress (Dunne & Leach, 2005).

Gender inequality in education continues to be a pressing issue in many parts of the world, especially in developing regions like Africa. In Nigeria, despite numerous efforts to promote gender equality in education, significant disparities still exist. The country recognizes that access to quality education is a fundamental right for every child, and several initiatives have been launched to address these imbalances.

One such initiative is the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education, introduced in 2017 by the Federal Ministry of Education. This policy focuses on increasing girls' access to education, improving their retention in schools, and raising the overall quality of education for all. It acknowledges that gender equality is not just a matter of human rights but also essential for achieving broader national development goals such as Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Beyond government-led efforts, civil society groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also stepped in to help reduce the gender gap. For example, *Girls Without Borders*, an NGO, has created school-based clubs across Nigeria that empower girls through leadership training, education about their rights, and advocacy skills. Despite these efforts, progress has been slow. According to a 2022 report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Nigeria is still far from achieving gender parity in education. This is particularly concerning given that SDG 4 specifically aims for inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

The gap in educational achievement between boys and girls remains a global concern for policymakers, researchers, and advocates alike. Education is not only a basic right but also a key driver of human capital development. Although some progress has been made, persistent barriers continue to hold girls back from accessing and completing their education. These challenges are complex and interconnected. Socio-cultural norms, economic hardship, and geographical barriers all contribute to gender disparities. In rural areas, for instance, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school due to early marriage, societal expectations, or a lack of nearby schools. In urban areas, while conditions may be slightly better, girls still face obstacles such as poverty, teenage pregnancies, and cultural norms that favor boys' education (Enyioko, 2021).

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) highlights the depth of the problem: according to the 2019 *Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria Report*, 34.72% of Nigerian women have no formal education. This statistic is even more alarming when broken down by region. Urban girls often face societal pressure to marry young or care for family members, while rural girls struggle with poor school infrastructure, long distances to schools, and traditional practices that limit their right to education (NBS, 2020).

Also, although government policies such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program are designed to provide free and compulsory education for all children, the implementation of these policies often falls short, particularly in rural areas. The lack of adequate funding, poor enforcement, and weak monitoring of these programs mean that many girls still do not have access to the resources and support they need to remain in school. Furthermore, cultural resistance to educating girls remains strong in many communities, despite government efforts to promote gender equality in education. Without sustained community engagement and the involvement of local leaders to shift perceptions about the value of girls' education, policies alone will not be enough to bridge the gender gap in educational attainment (Akinbote, 2021).

Gender Disparities in Primary Education

Gender disparities occur when people are treated differently or held to different expectations because of their gender, resulting in unequal opportunities for boys and girls in education. This issue is especially severe in rural areas, where girls face more obstacles to attending and completing school than boys.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, millions of girls are denied a basic education. UNESCO (2019) estimates that about 9 million girls aged 6–11 are out of school, compared with 6 million boys, and this gap is even wider in rural communities. Research by Dunne and Leach (2005) shows that traditional gender roles—which view boys' schooling as more valuable—drive much of this inequality. In many rural Nigerian communities, including Ado Local Government, cultural biases and deeply rooted patriarchal norms treat girls primarily as future homemakers rather than learners (Alabi & Alabi, 2014). As a result, girls' enrolment and completion rates lag behind boys', perpetuating a cycle of limited opportunities and reinforcing the perception that educating girls is less important.

Socio-Economic Barriers to Girls' Education

Socio-economic barriers are factors related to poverty and financial constraints that limit educational opportunities, particularly for girls. These barriers can include the direct and indirect costs of schooling, such as fees, uniforms, transportation, and the opportunity cost of lost household labor when girls attend school. Poverty is a significant factor in determining access to education, with families in low-income regions often facing tough choices regarding which child to send to school. Research by Lloyd and Mensch (2008) reveals that in many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, boys are typically prioritized for schooling because they are seen as future breadwinners, while girls are expected to take on household duties or marry early.

In low-income households, limited financial resources force parents to make difficult decisions regarding which children to send to school. Families often prioritize boys' education, viewing them as future earners who can provide financial security, while girls are typically seen as contributors to household duties or as future wives. As a result, resources such as school fees, uniforms, and supplies are often allocated to boys first, leaving girls at a disadvantage (UNESCO, 2019). This economic bias against girls' education is evident in many developing regions, where poverty rates are high and families face competing needs.

Another economic barrier is the opportunity cost of educating girls. In communities where girls contribute significantly to household income through domestic labor or agricultural work, sending them to school is viewed as a potential financial loss. This often applies in rural areas where the absence of girls from home means a reduction in household labor support, thereby impacting family income. Consequently, parents may keep girls out of school to help with household chores, care for siblings, or work on family farms, further limiting their educational prospects (Alabi & Alabi, 2014).

Additionally, the cost of transportation and inadequate school infrastructure pose further challenges. When families cannot afford safe, accessible transportation, girls are less likely to attend school, particularly in cases where schools are distant from home. This is compounded by a lack of gender-sensitive facilities, such as separate restrooms, which discourages attendance and retention, especially as girls reach adolescence. These infrastructural limitations increase absenteeism and dropout rates among girls, as schools lack essential facilities to support a safe and inclusive learning environment (Duale, Aden, Mohamed and Ismail, 2023).

The economic pressure to marry off daughters early also contributes to lower education rates among girls. Early marriage is often seen as a way to reduce financial strain on families, especially where dowries or bride prices are customary. Once married, girls typically leave school to fulfill domestic roles, and pregnancy may further complicate the possibility of returning. Early marriage and its impact on education contribute to cycles of poverty, limiting girls' future economic opportunities and reducing family income over generations (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

In rural communities like Ado Local Government, poverty often forces families to make difficult choices about which child to send to school. Lloyd and Mensch (2008) explain that in low-income households, boys are typically prioritized for schooling because they are seen as future breadwinners. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to contribute to household chores or prepare for early marriage, leading to lower enrolment and completion rates for girls.

In regions like Ado Local Government, economic hardship forces many families to view girls' education as a luxury rather than a necessity. The indirect costs associated with schooling, such as transportation, uniforms, and textbooks, further discourage the enrolment of girls. A study by Isiugo-Abanihe (2019) underscores the link between socio-economic status and educational attainment, noting that girls from poorer households are disproportionately affected by these costs, leading to high dropout rates.

Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

Gender disparities arise when people are treated differently because of their gender, creating gaps in who can go to school, how much they participate, and how far they advance in their studies. These inequalities hit girls hardest—especially in rural areas—where they face more hurdles than boys. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the problem is stark: UNESCO (2019) estimates that about 9 million girls aged 6–11 are out of school, compared with 6 million boys, with the gap widening in rural communities. Research by Dunne and Leach (2005) shows that traditional views—where boys' schooling is seen as more important—drive much of this imbalance. In places like Ado Local Government, economic pressures and long-standing cultural attitudes often lead families to invest in boys' education first, leaving girls with lower enrolment and higher dropout rates. Understanding these patterns is vital if we hope to design effective solutions that ensure every child—regardless of gender—can access, participate in, and complete their education. Alabi

and Alabi (2014) note that in Nigeria's rural areas—such as Ado Local Government—deep-seated cultural biases and patriarchal traditions keep girls from going to school by casting them primarily as future homemakers, which in turn downplays the value of formal education for them.

Socio-Economic Barriers to Girls' Education

Socio-economic barriers—rooted in poverty and tight household budgets—keep many girls out of school. Families in low-income areas must stretch their money to cover tuition, uniforms, books, and transportation. They also weigh the “opportunity cost” of losing girls' help at home—whether cooking, cleaning, caring for younger siblings, or working on the family farm. Research shows that in many rural parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, parents often decide to educate sons first, viewing them as future earners who will support the family (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Daughters, on the other hand, are expected to shoulder domestic duties or prepare for early marriage. As a result, scarce resources—school fees, uniforms, and learning materials—are usually allocated to boys, leaving girls at a serious disadvantage (UNESCO, 2019).

Families in many rural communities rely on girls' contributions at home—whether through cooking, caring for younger siblings, or working in the fields—and see sending them to school as a financial sacrifice. When a girl's absence means fewer hands to help with chores or farm work, parents often choose to keep her at home rather than cover the hidden “cost” of her education (Alabi & Alabi, 2014).

On top of this, getting to school and the state of school facilities create extra barriers. If families can't afford safe, reliable transport—or if the nearest school is a long, risky journey—girls are far less likely to attend. Once there, the lack of gender-sensitive amenities like separate, private restrooms only makes things harder, especially during adolescence. These combined factors—financial loss at home, costly or unsafe travel, and inadequate school facilities—drive up absenteeism and push many girls out of school altogether (Ismail, 2018).

In many communities, marrying off daughters early is seen as a way to ease financial burdens—especially where dowries or bride prices help support the family. Once a girl is married, she typically leaves school to take on household duties, and pregnancy makes returning to class even harder. This pattern not only cuts short her education but also traps families in long-term poverty, as girls miss out on the skills and opportunities that could boost their future earnings (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008). Poverty forces families to choose which children attend school, and sons usually win out because they're viewed as future breadwinners. Daughters, in contrast, are expected to shoulder chores at home or prepare for marriage, leading to lower enrolment and completion rates among girls. On top of that, indirect school costs—like transportation, uniforms, and textbooks—can be too much for struggling households. Research shows that girls from poorer families are hit hardest by these extra expenses, driving up dropout rates and widening the gender gap in education (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019).

Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

Cultural norms refer to the traditional beliefs, values, and practices that shape behavior in a given society. Gender roles are the societal expectations placed on individuals based on their gender. Together, these concepts explain how cultural expectations limit educational opportunities for girls. Cultural and traditional norms play a crucial role in reinforcing gender disparities in education. In many Nigerian communities, the traditional role of women is to take care of the household, which often means that girls are expected to forgo education in favor of domestic responsibilities. Isiugo-Abanihe (2019) discusses

how deeply entrenched cultural norms perpetuate early marriage and restrict girls' opportunities to pursue education.

Early marriage is a widespread cultural practice in rural areas, and it significantly contributes to school dropouts among girls. The perception that girls should be married off at a young age to secure their future and reduce the financial burden on their families limits their chances of continuing their education. Lloyd and Mensch (2008) found that early marriage not only hinders girls' educational attainment but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality, as girls are denied the opportunity to gain skills that could help improve their socio-economic status.

In many rural areas of Nigeria, including Ado Local Government, traditional gender roles dictate that girls' primary responsibilities are domestic. These cultural expectations reinforce the belief that girls do not need formal education, as their primary role is to marry and take care of the household. Isiugo-Abanihe (2019) emphasizes that cultural practices such as early marriage limit girls' ability to access and complete education, leading to gender disparities in educational attainment.

Cultural norms and gender roles are deeply ingrained societal expectations about the behaviors and responsibilities of individuals based on their gender. In many societies, especially rural communities, these norms significantly shape the opportunities available to boys and girls, often creating educational barriers for girls. In traditional settings, girls are frequently expected to fulfill roles within the household, such as assisting with chores, caring for siblings, and preparing for future responsibilities as wives and mothers. This expectation often means that parents see less value in educating girls, viewing their primary role as caregivers rather than as future earners or community leaders. According to UNESCO (2019), such cultural perceptions of gender roles lead families to prioritize boys' education, under the belief that boys' academic success directly benefits family welfare in the long run. Early marriage is another cultural factor that impacts girls' education, as many communities see early marriage as a way to secure a girl's future. This practice, prevalent in some areas of Nigeria and other developing regions, reinforces the notion that a girl's role is primarily domestic, focused on marriage and motherhood rather than personal development or career goals. Once married, girls are typically pulled out of school to attend to their families, thus disrupting their education. Research indicates that early marriage significantly reduces the likelihood of girls completing basic education, impacting their ability to contribute economically and socially to their communities (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008).

Religious beliefs also influence cultural attitudes toward gender and education, often placing girls in a submissive role compared to boys. In some communities, religious interpretations may reinforce the idea that a woman's place is in the home, caring for her family rather than engaging in formal education or professional pursuits. Such beliefs can discourage parents from sending girls to school, especially beyond primary education, as they feel it contradicts cultural or religious values (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2019). Additionally, cultural stigmas around menstruation can discourage girls from attending school, particularly where schools lack proper facilities and resources for menstrual hygiene. Cultural taboos surrounding menstruation and reproductive health may cause girls to stay home, leading to regular absenteeism and, ultimately, higher dropout rates. This issue highlights the need for gender-sensitive facilities and cultural education within schools to challenge and change negative attitudes about girls' natural biological processes.

Institutional Barriers and Infrastructural Challenges

Institutional barriers refer to the structural obstacles within the education system that hinder girls' access to quality education. Infrastructural challenges include inadequate school facilities, such as the lack of separate toilets for girls, long distances to schools, and unsafe learning environments. The lack of educational infrastructure in rural areas is another major factor contributing to gender disparities in education. Schools in many rural communities are often far from students' homes, which can be a deterrent for girls, especially in areas where safety concerns are prevalent. Dunne and Leach (2005) highlight that long distances to schools disproportionately affect girls due to the risks of sexual harassment and violence on the way to and from school. The distance to school is another critical infrastructural challenge. In rural communities, schools may be located far from students' homes, requiring long and often unsafe journeys, which discourages parents from sending girls to school, especially as they grow older. Safety concerns, including risks of harassment or violence, particularly impact girls, as parents may feel it is safer to keep them at home. Research shows that proximity to schools is a significant determinant of girls' enrollment and retention, emphasizing the need for more accessible educational facilities (Alabi & Alabi, 2014).

A lack of gender-sensitive policies in educational institutions also contributes to the problem. Schools may fail to address specific challenges faced by girls, such as early marriage or teenage pregnancy, and often lack programs or policies to help them re-enroll after prolonged absences. Without policies encouraging re-enrollment or flexible learning schedules, girls who drop out due to family obligations, marriage, or pregnancy find it challenging to return to school, leading to lower completion rates for female students (Plan International, 2017). Many schools in rural areas lack the necessary infrastructure to support girls' education. Alabi and Alabi (2014) point out that the absence of separate toilets and inadequate sanitary facilities prevent girls from attending school, particularly during menstruation. In addition, long distances to schools and concerns about safety further discourage girls from attending school. This leads to higher absenteeism and dropout rates among girls compared to boys.

A primary institutional barrier is the **lack of funding** in public schools, which affects the quality of education and availability of resources. In many rural areas, schools operate on limited budgets that cover only basic needs, often neglecting essential services that could encourage and support girls' participation. Without sufficient funding, schools struggle to maintain qualified teachers, provide learning materials, and ensure a safe environment for all students. These funding issues disproportionately affect girls, who are more vulnerable to leaving school when basic infrastructure, such as classrooms and clean facilities, is lacking (UNICEF, 2020).

Additionally, inadequate facilities, particularly a lack of gender-sensitive provisions such as separate toilets for girls, pose a significant challenge. Alabi and Alabi (2014) point out that many girls miss school during menstruation due to the absence of proper sanitary facilities, which contributes to higher absenteeism rates and lower retention rates among female students. This issue becomes more critical as girls grow older and reach adolescence.

Effectiveness of Government Policies in Addressing Gender Disparities

The Nigerian government has introduced various policies aimed at improving access to education, particularly for girls. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, introduced in 1999, is a key initiative designed to provide free and compulsory primary education for all Nigerian children. However,

its implementation has been fraught with challenges, particularly in rural areas. Akinbote (2021) critiques the UBE program, noting that poor funding, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient monitoring of schools have limited its effectiveness in reducing gender disparities in education.

One major policy initiative in Nigeria is the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which aims to provide free, compulsory primary and junior secondary education for all children. This policy has helped improve enrolment rates nationwide; however, its impact on gender equity has been uneven. In rural areas, where cultural barriers to girls' education are more deeply entrenched, the program has had limited success in increasing girls' retention and completion rates. Inadequate funding and a lack of gender-sensitive approaches within the UBE framework have hindered its effectiveness in reaching girls who are most at risk of dropping out (UNESCO, 2019).

Conditional cash transfer programs are another strategy adopted by governments to encourage school attendance among disadvantaged children, especially girls. These programs provide financial incentives to low-income families to support their children's schooling, with a focus on keeping girls in school. Studies show that conditional cash transfers have been successful in increasing enrolment and reducing dropout rates among girls in some regions. However, the effectiveness of these programs can be limited by inconsistent funding and a lack of awareness among communities about available support. Furthermore, cash transfers may be insufficient in addressing the deeper cultural attitudes that undervalue girls' education, which requires complementary awareness campaigns and community engagement (World Bank, 2020).

Government initiatives to curb early marriage through legislation and awareness campaigns have also aimed to reduce gender disparities in education. Early marriage is a significant factor contributing to girls' dropout rates, as girls who marry young are more likely to leave school and less likely to return. Laws banning child marriage, when enforced alongside community-based awareness programs, can be effective in delaying marriage and encouraging continued education for girls. However, enforcement of these laws remains a challenge, especially in rural areas where cultural norms support early marriage and where local leaders may prioritize tradition over formal regulations (Girls Not Brides, 2018).

The National Policy on Gender in Basic Education in Nigeria has also sought to mainstream gender equity in educational planning, curriculum development, and teacher training. This policy highlights the need for inclusive practices in schools, such as gender-sensitive teaching methods and the elimination of gender stereotypes in educational materials. While the policy sets a foundation for gender-responsive education, its effectiveness is often hindered by inadequate teacher training, limited monitoring of gender equity progress, and insufficient resources to support implementation in underfunded schools (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2017).

Another promising policy approach has been the expansion of gender-sensitive infrastructure in schools, including separate sanitation facilities, safe transportation options, and menstrual hygiene support for adolescent girls. Gender-sensitive infrastructure reduces barriers to attendance and retention, particularly for girls facing puberty-related challenges. However, the impact of this policy depends heavily on consistent funding and maintenance. In many areas, especially rural communities, inadequate facilities persist due to funding gaps and a lack of prioritization, underscoring the need for government commitment to sustaining these improvements (WaterAid, 2019).

Government policies on education refer to the official strategies, regulations, and programs introduced by governments to promote equal access to education. In Nigeria, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program is a key policy aimed at providing free and compulsory primary education for all children. While the UBE program was introduced to ensure that all Nigerian children have access to basic education, its implementation in rural areas like Ado Local Government has been limited by challenges such as poor funding, inadequate teacher training, and weak enforcement of compulsory education laws. Akinbote (2021) criticizes the program, stating that despite its potential, the poor infrastructure and limited resources in rural areas hinder its ability to address gender disparities effectively. Despite the policy's good intentions, cultural resistance and logistical challenges in regions like Ado Local Government hinder the program's success. For instance, while the UBE policy mandates free education, the hidden costs associated with attending school (e.g., uniforms, transportation) still present barriers for poor families, particularly when it comes to sending girls to school.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the extent of Gender disparities in the enrollment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government Area, Ekiti State. Specifically, the study:

i. examined the underlying factors contributing to gender disparities in primary education, including socio-cultural, economic, and policy-related influences

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the gender disparities in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State?
2. What factors contribute to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government?
3. How do socio-economic conditions influence the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government?
4. How effective are government policies, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive research of the survey type to investigate gender disparities in enrollment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government. The descriptive survey design was appropriate for capturing the current trends related to gender in education, particularly as it allows for the collection of data from a broad population over a relatively short period. The population of this study consisted of primary school students within Ado Local Government. The sample for the study comprised 200 respondents selected from 10 primary schools from Ado Local Government using simple random sampling technique. Stratified sampling technique was used to select Twenty students from each school Ado Local Government of Ekiti State. The instrument used to collect data was Titled; Gender Disparities in the Enrollment and Attainment of Primary Education among Adolescents (GDEAPEA). It has two sections A and B. Section A consisted of the respondents personal data such as sex, age, name of school and class. While section B consist of items that Gender disparities in the enrollment and attainment of primary education among adolescents. To ascertain the validity of the instrument, copies of the questionnaire were given to experts in Test and Measurement in the Faculty of

Education Ekiti State University to ensure the face and content validity. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the gender disparities in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of disparities in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference
Male	87	21.16	9.04	5.29
Female	113	26.45	11.21	

Table 1 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of disparities in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State to be 21.16; 9.04 and 26.45; 11.21 for male and female respondents respectively with a mean difference of 5.29. The mean score is apparently higher for male respondents than their female counterparts. It could be said from the above table that gender disparities exist in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State.

Research Question 2: What factors contribute to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government?

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of the factors contributing to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government

S/N	ITEMS	Agree		Disagree	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
1	The cost of schooling (e.g., uniforms, supplies) prevents some parents from enrolling girls in primary school.	132	66.0	68	34.0
2	Girls are more affected by household poverty, which influences their ability to attend and complete school.	156	78.0	44	12.0
3	Cultural expectations and traditional beliefs discourage girls from enrolling in or completing primary education.	150	75.0	50	25.0
4	Long distances to school are a significant barrier to girls' enrollment and retention.	142	71.0	58	29.0
5	Parental attitudes towards education impact girls' school enrollment more than boys.	128	64.0	72	36.0
6	Existing government policies are effective in promoting gender equality in primary education.	106	53.0	94	47.0
7	More government programs are needed to address the specific challenges faced by girls in primary education.	154	77.0	46	23.0
8	Providing financial assistance or scholarships for girls would help improve their enrollment and retention rates.	120	60.0	80	40.0

Table 2 shows the Frequency and Percentage of the factors contributing to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government. The responses of the respondents were collapsed to agree and disagree for easy interpretation. 156 (78.0%) of the respondents said that Girls are more affected by household poverty, which influences their ability to attend and complete school while 150 (75.0%) of them said that Cultural expectations and traditional beliefs discourage girls from enrolling in or completing primary education. 142 (71.0%) of the respondents said that Long distances to school are a significant barrier to girls' enrollment and retention while 132 (66.0%) of them said that The cost of schooling (e.g., uniforms, supplies) prevents some parents from enrolling girls in primary school. 128 (64.0%) of the respondents said that Parental attitudes towards education impact girls' school enrollment more than boys while 106 (53.0%) of them said that Existing government policies are effective in promoting gender equality in primary education. It could be said from the above table that the factors contributing to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government ranges from household poverty, Long distances to school, cost of schooling, Parental attitudes towards education and Existing government policies.

Research Question 3: How do socio-economic conditions influence the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the influence of socio-economic condition on the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government

Socio-economic Condition	N	Mean	SD	Rank
High	27	5.34	1.04	3 rd
Moderate	113	26.45	11.16	1 st
Low	60	17.14	6.07	2 nd

Table 3 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of the influence of socio-economic condition on the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government to be 5.34; 1.04, 26.45; 11.16 and 17.14; 6.07 for high, moderate and low economic condition respectively. The mean is apparently higher for those with moderate economic condition than those with high and low status. It could be said from the above table that socio-economic condition influence the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government.

Research Question 4: How effective are government policies, such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government?

Table 4: Frequency and Percentage of the government policies in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government

S/N	ITEMS	Agree		Disagree	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
1	Government policies adequately support girls' enrollment and completion in primary school.	154	77.0	46	23.0
2	There are gaps in policy implementation that affect girls' ability to complete primary school.	40	20.0	160	80.0
3	Existing government policies are effective in promoting gender equality in primary education.	168	84.0	32	16.0
4	More government programs are needed to address the specific challenges faced by girls in primary education.	152	76.0	48	24.0

Table 4 shows the Frequency and Percentage of the government policies in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government. The responses of the respondents were collapsed to agree and disagree for easy interpretation. 168 (84.0%) of the respondents said that existing government policies are effective in promoting gender equality in primary education while 154 (77.0%) of the respondents said that Government policies adequately support girls' enrollment and completion in primary school. about 152 (76.0%) of the respondents said that More government programs are needed to address the specific challenges faced by girls in primary education. It could be said from the above table that government policies in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government are effective.

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study revealed that gender disparities exists in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State. This finding is in agreement to the submission of UNESCO (2019) reports that girls are significantly more likely to be out of school than boys, with millions of girls missing out on primary education. In rural areas like Ado Local Government, gender disparities are often exacerbated by socio-economic and cultural factors that prioritize boys' education over girls.

The finding of this study also revealed that the factors contributing to the lower enrolment and completion rates of girls compared to boys in primary education in Ado Local Government ranges from household poverty, Long distances to school, cost of schooling, Parental attitudes towards education and Existing government policies. This finding corroborates the submission of Akinbote (2021) who submitted that despite the UBE policy's good intentions, cultural resistance and logistical challenges in regions like Ado Local Government hinder the program's success. For instance, while the UBE policy mandates free education, the hidden costs associated with attending school (e.g., uniforms, transportation) still present barriers for poor families, particularly when it comes to sending girls to school.

The finding of this study further revealed that socio-economic condition influence the gender gap in primary school enrolment and attainment in Ado Local Government. This finding is in line with the finding of Lloyd and Mensch (2008) who said that poverty is a significant factor in determining access to education, with families in low-income regions often facing tough choices regarding which child to send to school and that in many rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, boys are typically prioritized for schooling because they are seen as future breadwinners, while girls are expected to take on household duties or

marry early. In low-income households, limited financial resources force parents to make difficult decisions regarding which children to send to school. Families often prioritize boys' education, viewing them as future earners who can provide financial security, while girls are typically seen as contributors to household duties or as future wives. As a result, resources such as school fees, uniforms, and supplies are often allocated to boys first, leaving girls at a disadvantage (UNESCO, 2019).

The finding of this study also revealed that government policies in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government are effective. This finding is in agreement with the submission of Akinbote (2021) who criticized the UBE program, noting that poor funding, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient monitoring of schools have limited its effectiveness in reducing gender disparities in education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings in this study, it could be concluded that there exist gender disparities in the enrolment and attainment of primary education among adolescents in Ado Local Government, Ekiti State but Government policies in addressing gender disparities in education in Ado Local Government are effective.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Equal opportunities should be given to both male and female students when considering the enrollment ratio.
2. There should be poverty alleviation programmes for parents and schools should be cited close to residential for ease access
3. Government should subsidize school finances i.e school fees so as to accommodate more potential students
4. Government policies in addressing gender disparities in education should be maintained.

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