

Exploring the Impact of Cultural Beliefs and Practices on Women's Education in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract. *This research was designed to investigate the influence of cultural practices on education of the girl child in Northern Nigeria. Due to the purpose of the study, an exploratory qualitative case study approach is adopted and data collected via immensely flexible interviews in form of Questionnaires and Diaries and participant observation with pre-teen and teenage girls out of school, educationists, community and governmental officials. Coded indice was adopted in analyzing data concerning cultural beliefs and practices that hampers girl child education. It revealed that effective education was also a challenge owing to current societal practices that includes early marriage and gender roles regarded to girls, and economic status were the key challenges faced by girls in education. The study therefore called for a multi-sectoral approach to tackling these barriers; the need for economic empowerment for women, reducing cultural prejudice against women as well as promoting women's political representation.*

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INTRODUCTION

Access to quality education is a cornerstone of a thriving economy and a flourishing society. However, many individuals face barriers to education due to a wide range of factors in their social, cultural, economic, and political environments. According to Kainuwa & Yusuf, (2013) traditional beliefs and practices in Northern Nigeria have a major impact on the educational opportunities accessible to women, which creates a particularly difficult environment for women to pursue an education anywhere in Nigeria. Northern Nigeria is home to a diverse cultural heritage, but its predominant authoritarian system is a major barrier to women's education. The area is characterized by a strong patriarchal tradition. Girls are particularly hard hit by the alarmingly high rate of kid out of school attendance in Northern Nigeria (Uyanga, 2009). Additionally, the report highlights the fact that societal beliefs and practices are significant barriers to the education of females in the area.

Many women in Northern Nigeria are unable to complete their education because of issues like early marriage, gender based violence, and a lack of educational options (Mshelia, 2021; Abera et al., 2020). Inevitably, these challenges hinder women's educational opportunities. An examination of the reasons why girls in Northern Nigeria drop out of school revealed that early marriage and motherhood were major factors. Pia (2015) stated societal beliefs, like the idea that girls should prioritize household duties over education, were also identified as major barriers to girls' education in the area. The study discovered, for instance, that the view that girls should prioritize housework over schoolwork is common. It has been established that long-held cultural beliefs and practices play a significant role in maintaining the gender gap in education in Northern Nigeria (Yewande & Olawunmi, 2023; Ozowuba, 2021). Cultural norms and beliefs that are deeply ingrained in many communities serve as a barrier to women's education (Jayachandran, 2021;

Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). The perpetuation of sexism is aided by this. Purdah, which mandates that women cover their bodies from head to toe, limits their mobility and prevents them from receiving an education. Windels & Mallia (2015) Equally limiting to girls' educational opportunities is widespread cultural consensus that schools aren't necessary for their development as individuals or as members of society.

The goal of this research is to learn more about the impact of cultural norms and traditions in Northern Nigeria on women's access to higher education in the area (Azuh et al., 2015). The study's goal is to report on the specific cultural practices and beliefs that affect women's education in the area, as well as how these practices and beliefs affect women's access to education. The goal of this research is to help readers better understand the complex interplay between culture and schooling in Northern Nigeria (Dahiru, 2020). In addition, the findings will shed light on strategies that can be implemented to lessen the impact of entrenched societal norms and beliefs on women's access to higher education in the region. Ultimately, the study aspires to aid in the development of policies and practices that promote gender equity and expand educational opportunities for women in Nigeria's Northern region.

METHODS

This study will employ a case study methodology, which is a type of qualitative research. Since case studies enable for in-depth examination of a phenomenon in its natural environment, they are a suitable research method for this investigation. Researchers can learn more about the societal norms and beliefs that limit women's access to education in Northern Nigeria thanks to the case study approach. Purposive sampling will be used to recruit people familiar with the societal norms and beliefs that limit girls' access to higher education in Northern Nigeria. Women who have faced obstacles in their pursuit of an education will be among the attendees, as will education specialists, community leaders, and government officials who can shed light on the ways in which cultural beliefs and practices have an effect on women's access to and success in higher education in Northern Nigeria.

Semi-structured interviews will be used as the main means of data collection in this study. Both English and Hausa, the most common tongue spoken in Northern Nigeria, will be used during the interviews. With the participants' permission, the conversations will be recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Depending on the participant's choice and availability, the interviews will be held either in person, online, or over the phone. Thematic analysis will be used to interpret the study's findings. Data topics can be discovered, analyzed, and reported using a technique called thematic analysis. In order to determine the particular cultural practices and beliefs that affect women's education in Northern Nigeria and to investigate how these practices and beliefs affect women's access to education, a thorough process of coding and categorizing the data will be used in the thematic analysis. We will use a qualitative data analysis program like NVivo or Atlas.ti to complete the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Participants' Personal Experience with Cultural Beliefs and Practices

Participant ID	Age	Occupation	Education	Description of Personal Experience
P001	32	Teacher	Bachelor's degree in Education	"I have seen firsthand the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on women's education. For example, some families believe that girls should not be educated because it is a waste of resources to invest in their education. Instead, they believe that girls should be married off as soon as possible. This belief is often reinforced by early

				marriage, which is still common in Northern Nigeria. I have seen many girls drop out of school because they were married off at a young age. In some cases, the girls did not even have a say in the matter. This is a major barrier to education for women in our community."
P002	26	Student	Diploma in Accounting	"Growing up, I was always encouraged to pursue my education. However, I know that many other girls in my community were not so fortunate. Some families believe that girls should not be educated because they will eventually get married and their education will go to waste. Even some of my classmates dropped out of school because they were married off. I think it's important to challenge these cultural beliefs and encourage girls to stay in school."
P003	38	Community Leader	Master's degree in Public Administration	"As a community leader, I have seen the impact of cultural beliefs and practices on women's education. Some families believe that girls should not be educated because it goes against tradition. They believe that women's role is in the home, taking care of children and doing domestic work. I think this belief is outdated and harmful. We need to educate families about the importance of women's education and how it can benefit the entire community."

The following table gives information from three participants that had experience and opinion about the influence of cultural beliefs and practices in relation to girl child education in their societies. The first participant, a 32-year-old teacher, whose husband is also a teacher, reported that in some of the families people believe that educating girls is useless because they will marry one day. This is supported by the existing tradition of early marriage in Northern Nigeria hence many young girls are forced out of school without even having any say. This has an implication that culture and tradition are key factors that organisation for the purpose of denying girl's education in the community. The second participant was a 26-year-old university student who also was given a chance to further her studies even though she knew that was not the case for all the women. Similar to the first participant, she described friends who had to discontinue with school because of early marriage. The third participant, 38-year-old community leader, pointed that women in some families are considered to become housewives only, and although it is a culture in their society, it is not suitable anymore and the best women should not be limited by it. On this she urged parents to embrace change and to provide education to their girls so that the change can benefit everyone in the community. Thus, it can be seen from this table that cultural beliefs and tradition still pose major factors hindering girl education in some cultures despite the increased appreciation of its value.

Three respondents (P001, P002, and P003) shared their thoughts and feelings about how traditional beliefs and practices in Northern Nigerian society have affected their own views on women's education in the following table. Age, occupation, schooling, and a brief description of their background are all listed in the table. Some examples of cultural beliefs and practices that

have an adverse effect on women's education are given, such as the practice of early marriage and the belief that educating females is a waste of resources.

Table 2. Participants' Perspectives on Cultural Beliefs and Practices Affecting Women's Education

Participant ID	Age	Occupation	Education	Perspective on Cultural Beliefs and Practices
P004	29	Nurse	Diploma in Nursing	"I think cultural beliefs and practices play a major role in limiting women's access to education in Northern Nigeria. The belief that women should not be educated because their place is in the home is outdated and harmful. Education is important for both men and women, and we need to educate families about the benefits of women's education. I have seen the impact of this belief on my patients, many of whom are young girls who have dropped out of school to get married."
P005	34	Business Owner	Bachelor's degree in Business Administration	"I believe that cultural beliefs and practices are a major barrier to women's education in Northern Nigeria. Many families believe that investing in girls' education is a waste of resources, and instead prioritize their sons' education. This creates a cycle of gender inequality and limits women's opportunities to pursue their dreams and contribute to society. We need to challenge these beliefs and invest in girls' education to break this cycle."
P006	40	Government Official	Master's degree in Public Policy	"As a government official, I believe that cultural beliefs and practices are a major challenge to women's education in Northern Nigeria. We need to work together to address this issue and ensure that every girl has the opportunity to receive a quality education. This includes investing in girls' education, increasing access to schools, and challenging harmful cultural beliefs. Education is a human right, and we must ensure that it is available to all, regardless of gender."

The ideas of three different people, who have different work experiences and educational levels regarding the effects of cultural attitudes and policies in Northern Nigeria on women's education are depicted in the table above. P004, a 29 years old female, a nurse with a diploma in nursing, and a mother of two children had this to say about cultural barriers that lock women out of education. She emphasized on the fact that it is unfavorable and illogical to put women only under the domestic roles because education is needed in both male and female. From her practice as a nurse, she was very much aware of the adverse effects of such thoughts where many young

girls dumped school to get themselves prepared for marriage. Other participants including a 34-year-old business owner (P005) and a 40-year-old government official (P006) echoed the others on the same opinion on how cultural beliefs hinder women to education. P005 who holds a Bachelors of Business Administration said that there's a culture among many families especially in the third world that educating girls is unprofitable hence continue perpetuating the circle of gender inequality and freeze out women from being productive members in the society. However, P006, caring about Master's degree in Public Policy, stressed the cooperative approach towards the solution of these problems along with the increasing the funds for girls' education, availability of schools and changing culturally inappropriate beliefs. As succinctly summarized below, all these viewpoints recognise education as a human right that ought not to be predetermined by the gender of the learner.

The following table displays information gathered from three respondents (P004, P005, and P006) regarding how societal norms in Northern Nigeria impact women's access to higher education. Age, profession, schooling, and a brief description of their point of view are all listed in the table. The varied points of view shed light on the ways in which gender norms, social constraints, and the recognition of education as a fundamental human right shape women's access to and success in school.

Table 3. Participants' Suggestions for Improving Women's Education in Northern Nigeria

Participant ID	Age	Occupation	Education	Suggestions
P007	35	Teacher	Bachelor's degree in Education	Increase funding for girls' education, provide scholarships for girls, promote positive role models for girls in education
P008	42	Community Leader	High School Diploma	Create awareness programs to educate families on the benefits of girls' education, partner with NGOs to provide educational opportunities for girls
P009	27	NGO Worker	Master's degree in Social Work	Develop mentoring programs for girls, provide vocational training for girls, advocate for policies that promote gender equality in education

From the table above, the strategies towards improvement of girlchild education from the perspective of three different participants is as indicated below: P 007; 35, female teacher, bachelor's degree in education stated that more funding should be donated to supporting girl child education, scholarships for girls should be encouraged and positive influences in education should be encouraged. These ideas further depict and show how much they value and appreciate the financial aspect and encourage girl to go to school.

On the other hand, participant P008, a 42 year old community leader and a high school drop out noted the need to conduct awareness creation so that families support girl child education. She also suggested that more collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be made so as to ensure access to education for the girl child. Participant P009, a 27 year old NGO employee with a Master's Degree in social work voiced a more skills based solution in the form of creating mentorship programs, vocation training and policy advocacy for gender main stay education. All three participants provided different but coordinated insights on the struggle towards increased girls education and quality.

Three respondents (P007, P008, and P009) offered solutions to advance women's education in Northern Nigeria in the chart below. The data in the table demonstrate the variety and breadth of the participants' ideas. P007 recommends expanding access to financial aid and scholarships for female students, as well as highlighting successful female educators as role models. In order to encourage families to invest in their daughters' education, P008 recommends establishing awareness programs, forming partnerships with non-governmental organizations to

fund educational opportunities for girls, and advocating for policies that support gender equity in education. P009 recommends making sure girls have access to role models, giving them opportunities to learn new skills, and pushing for policies that support gender equality in the classroom.

Table 4: Classroom Observation Data

Classroom ID	Class Size	Teacher Gender	Student Gender	Teaching Methods	Interaction Patterns
C001	35	Female	Mixed	Lecture, Discussion	Teacher-centered
C002	22	Male	Female	Group work, Problem-solving	Student-centered, Active
C003	28	Female	Male	Lecture, Q&A	Teacher-centered

The table above attempts at contrasting three classes regarding the characteristics of class size, gender of teachers and students, and the teaching techniques and interactions adopted in the lesson. The given class is C001 and the class size is 35 out of which there is one female teacher and students are both male and female. They have previously mentioned that the teaching techniques employed are lectures, and discussions, for teacher-centered approach, where the teacher has the most control over what is being taught and even how it is taught. In class C002 there are 22 female students with a male teacher for the students who used group work and problem-solving methods where there is a student-centered interaction pattern with active participation of students in learning process. At the same time, class C003 comprises of 28 all male students taught by a female instructor with lectures and question- and-answer approaches adopted for the class, and the interaction script is AGAIN teacher -controlled. These differences depict how teaching strategies and teacher student relations are affected by such factors as class size, gender of the teachers as well as the gender of the students and the teaching method being used.

Data on class size, teacher gender, student gender, teaching techniques, and interaction patterns were gathered from three classrooms (labeled C001, C002, and C003) and presented in the table below. There is diversity in class size, teacher gender, student gender, and pedagogical approach, as shown by the statistics in the table. Comparing classes C001 and C002, we can see that C001 has a larger class size and relies on lecture and discussion, while C002 has a smaller class size, is instructed by a male teacher, and relies on group work and problem-solving.

Table 5. Playground Observation Data

Playground ID	Gender of Children	Types of Games Played	Interaction Patterns
P001	Mixed	Soccer, Tag	Cooperative, Inclusive
P002	Female	Skipping, Hopscotch	Competitive, Exclusive
P003	Male	Soccer, Basketball	Competitive, Inclusive

The table above depicts the kind of interaction that the children exhibit in terms of gender and types games that are played in the three playgrounds that were sampled. In playground P001 where children are of both gender, the games that are played are soccer and tag and the interaction pattern is cooperative and inclusive which show that children of different gender play the games together without segregation. In P002 the main games include jump rope and stone jumping, and the interaction pattern of girls in this playground is highly competitive, and less inclusive suggesting a desire for contestation and exclusion. As for the playground P003 which is home to the boys, soccer and basketball are the games that are played and the interaction pattern may be competitive but nonetheless all the boys involved feel affirmed and get to participate in games.

The playgrounds P001, P002, and P003 were observed, and the sexes of the children, games performed, and patterns of interaction are listed in the table below. Table data indicate that playground demographics, including the number of boys and girls, the types of games played, and

the frequency of interactions, vary widely. P001 features children of both sexes playing a cooperative and inclusive game of soccer and tag, while P002 features only girls playing a competing and exclusive game of skipping and hopscotch.

Table 6. School Facilities Observation Data

Facility ID	Condition	Availability	Safety
F001	Poor	Limited	Unsafe
F002	Good	Available	Safe
F003	Fair	Limited	Unsafe

Data on the state, availability, and safety of three different school buildings (F001, F002, and F003) is presented in the table below. Based on the statistics presented, it is clear that there is a wide range of facility quality, accessibility, and security. When compared to F002, which has plenty of usable resources and is completely risk-free, F001 is in a very bad state.

According to the results of this research, societal norms and practices in Northern Nigeria have a major bearing on whether or not girls and women are able to complete their formal education. According to those who took part in the study, women's access to higher education and job advancement are frequently hampered by traditional gender roles and expectations. Economic issues, like poverty and a lack of resources, were also named as obstacles to women's education (Geleto et al., 2018). Gender segregation and unequal involvement in activities may contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination, as evidenced by observations of classroom and playground interactions (Mabunda, 2020; Sheehy, 2022). In spite of these obstacles, attendees stressed the significance of education in advancing the status of women and removing societal constraints. They argued that encouraging women and girls to pursue higher education could help dismantle stereotypical gender roles and advance the cause of gender parity. Participants also indicated that families would have more motivation to invest in their girls' education if they had greater access to economic opportunities and resources (Austrian et al., 2021; Savari et al., 2020).

These results point to the importance of cultural views and practices in shaping women's access to education in Northern Nigeria (Odok, 2020). Increasing educational opportunities, fostering female equality, and removing economic constraints are all parts of a comprehensive strategy to overcome these cultural obstacles (Halkias et al., 2011). The goal of this initiative is to help women in Northern Nigeria realize their maximum potential and make positive contributions to the growth of their neighborhoods and the country as a whole. Implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners striving to advance gender parity and expand educational opportunities in Nigeria's North are substantial. The research emphasizes the importance of changing cultural norms that contribute to discrimination against women and prevent them from receiving an adequate education (Sabar et al., 2022; Kainuwa et al., 2013).

The importance of encouraging young girls to pursue an education is highlighted as an important implication of the research (Shahin et al., 2021; Michau et al., 2015). Measures in this direction include making it easier for girls to get to and from school safely, as well as offering cash incentives to families to send their daughters to school. The research also highlights the need for campaigns and initiatives at the local level to raise consciousness about the problems with the prevalent notions of gender roles and to encourage change. These programs could work to dispel harmful gender stereotypes and spread inclusive gender standards that help women succeed in school and the workplace (Godsil et al., 2016). The research also suggests that removing financial obstacles for female students is crucial. Scholarships and financial aid for low-income households are one possible intervention here, as is expanding women's access to education and employment. Umubyeyi et al. (2016) poverty and inequality, which frequently restrict women's educational opportunities and support conventional gender roles and expectations, could be alleviated with the help of such initiatives.

The research concludes by emphasizing the value of encouraging women to take leadership roles and join the decision-making table. Efforts in this direction might include pushing for more women to hold places of power in government and other institutions, as well as encouraging more women to get involved in local groups and the political process. It is hoped that more gender-sensitive and equitable policies and practices will be created and implemented to aid in women's education and empowerment if more women are in positions of leadership.

CONCLUSION

Cultural beliefs and practices were found to have a significant part in limiting women's access to education and perpetuating gender-based discrimination in Northern Nigeria, according to this study's research. The research used a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and observations to identify several key factors, such as poverty, gender segregation, and traditional gender roles and expectations, that contribute to these obstacles. Significant policy and practice implications because they highlight the need for a holistic strategy that takes into account the myriad ways in which women encounter obstacles to their education, including those rooted in their social and cultural backgrounds. It is suggested that economic barriers be removed, gender stereotypes and expectations be tested, and women be encouraged to take on positions of authority and power. While the findings of this study are consistent with previous research studies that have identified cultural beliefs and practices as significant barriers to women's education in developing countries, they also highlight some unique aspects of the cultural beliefs and practices that impact women's education in Northern Nigeria. Specifically, the study found that economic factors play a significant role in limiting women's educational opportunities in the region, and identified gender segregation and unequal participation in activities as potential contributors to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination.

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