

Parental Attitude, Cultural Beliefs and Secondary School Female Students Enrolment in Afijio Local Government Area

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of parental attitude and cultural beliefs on secondary school female students' enrolment in Afijio Local Government Area. A descriptive survey research design was adopted and the population of the study comprised of all parents in Afijio Local Government. The sample for the study was 200 parents drawn from the population using a stratified random sampling technique. One research question and three hypotheses guided the study. Self structured questionnaire was used to collect data which were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation to answer the research question, while inferential statistical tool of multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. The findings indicated that parental attitude ($\beta = 0.42, p < 0.05$) plays a significant role in the enrolment of female students in secondary school. Cultural beliefs ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.05$) significantly influenced female students enrolment decisions and both were jointly found, with $R^2 = 0.37$, to influence the female students' enrolment in the study area. The study recommended, among others, that government and NGOs should organize community campaigns to enlighten parents on the long-term benefits of educating girls, including economic empowerment.

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Introduction

Enrolment trends in secondary education experienced important transformation in recent decades; this transformation is influenced by evolving policy landscapes, economic shifts and demographic transitions. While global figures indicate an upward trend in enrolment, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, disparities remain stark across regions, genders and socio-economic groups (UNESCO, 2022). The expansion of primary education over the past two decades has increased demand for secondary schooling, placing increased pressure on educational infrastructure. Though it indicates progress, but secondary education continues to suffer from bottlenecks, with dropout rates rising sharply after completion of primary school in many settings, particularly in rural and conflict affected areas (World Bank, 2022). In the same vein, UNESCO (2021) reported that although sub-Saharan Africa has seen improvements in girls' school attendance, high dropout rates linked to poverty and gender expectations still undermine long-term retention.

Socio economic status plays a key role in secondary school participation. Children from low- income households face so many barriers, including the direct costs of schooling, the opportunity cost of labour and lack of access to quality schools (Burnett & Gough, 2021). Akinfaderin and Oladipo (2022) further emphasized that financial burdens remain a major reason many girls withdraw from school before completing their studies. Even where tuition is free, the expenses related to uniforms, transportation and learning materials pose major obstacles. Rural areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, incompetent teacher and limited access to higher- level schools (Ali & Tambo, 2022). Many students in this context are required to travel long distances, which not only affects school attendance but also exposes them to physical and psychological risks. Enrolment process may be hindered by transportation and procedural hurdle especially in low income and rural areas, where records are often lacking or schools are difficult to access.

In many parts of the world, digitalization has helped streamline the process, allowing for online registration, real time data collection and increased transparency (OECD, 2022). The quality of secondary education is another determinant of enrolment trends. Poor learning environments, overburdened teachers and rigid teaching methods contribute to high repetition and dropout rates, particularly in under-resourced schools (Schleicher, 2022).

Students are more likely to continue their education when they experience supportive and stimulating educational setting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a permanent mark on secondary education enrolment. Many students from low-income background, never returned to school after closures due to hardship, early marriage or re-entry challenges (Malala Fund, 2021). The setback emphasized the weakness of secondary education systems and the need for robust resilience planning. Secondary education is a crucial passage for empowerment, and ensuring equitable access to it remains a priority for global education systems.

Education is recognized as a driving force for national progress, socio economic development and equal opportunity for all genders. Gender remains a crucial analytical lens in secondary education enrolment. While global statistics suggests that gender parity has nearly been achieved at lower secondary levels, upper secondary education tells a different story (UNICEF, 2023). In many parts of Nigeria, the enrolment and retention of female students in secondary schools remain a worrisome trend despite the strategies and commitments made by the government. This issue is obvious in the rural areas where long standing cultural practices and parental attitudes continue to shape the outcome of education. Girls drop out due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities and cultural limitation. Conversely, in some high-income countries and urban areas, boys are increasingly under-represented, particularly among marginalized ethnic groups (OECD, 2022).

However, challenges remain for disadvantaged communities that do not have access to digital network system. Despite all efforts made to spread education widely, the gap in female enrolment persists. Though female student enrolment has shown considerable improvement globally in the past two decades, significant gender disparities still exist, especially at secondary and tertiary levels, with the most affected regions being sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and areas experiencing conflict (UNESCO, 2022). In Nigeria, enrolment among girls continues to show a blended design. The southern and urban regions have experienced improvements, while the northern part of the country is behind due to deep-rooted poverty, insecurity and cultural beliefs. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), Nigeria accounts for over sixty percent of out-of-school girls in West Africa. Factors such as early marriage, cultural practices, domestic responsibilities and gender-based violence contribute significantly to low enrolment and high dropout rates among girls.

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Educating girls is not only an advantage to an individual but a legacy benefit. Also, it is not merely a social good but a foundational right that underpins broader human development. UNESCO (2022) revealed that every additional year of schooling for a girl reduces her likelihood of child marriage by six percent and increases her potential earnings by up to twenty percent over a life time. Kebede (2020) found that the intersection of family-level decisions and community-level traditions strongly predicts whether girls in Ethiopia remain in school. Socio economic barriers continue to be a major constraint on enrolment, especially for penniless households where children, particularly girls, are expected to contribute to home duties. Studies have shown that when families face economic hardship, they are more likely to prioritize boy's education over girls, viewing investment in girls schooling as less economically rewarding (Plan international, 2023). Eze and Okafor (2021) were of the opinion that cultural norms and parental expectations jointly determine educational outcomes for girls in rural Nigeria. In a broader African context, Chaudhry and Rahman (2021) opined that, in the South Asian study, girls' enrolment is best explained by the combined influence of parental approval and prevailing socio-cultural beliefs. This study examined parental attitude and cultural beliefs, whether it influence the enrolment of female secondary school students in Afijio local government area of Oyo state.

Parental attitude is a significant contributor that influences the enrolment of female students at the secondary education level. Okeke et al. (2022) reported that parents' perception of girls' education in southeastern Nigeria determines whether daughters are enrolled and retained in school. The socio-economic background of families strongly affects parental perspectives on female education. Girls are often the first to be withdrawn from school when resources are scarce with the assumption that their educational returns are minimal. Parents with little or no education and low income view female education as of lower importance often favouring early marriage or assigning girls to household responsibilities over their schooling.

In Sokoto, a significant number of parents expressed their fear over the potential of their daughters becoming involved in premarital relationship while attending secondary school, fearing unwanted pregnancy, and social stigma it could bring upon the family (Aliero, 2022). Umar (2021) also observed in northern Nigeria that parental concerns about morality and domestic responsibilities limit girls' chances of progressing beyond primary school. These fears usually lead to either early withdrawal of girls from school or their non-enrolment altogether. Research from Northern Nigeria shows that some parents, based on

their religious reasoning, prefer early marriage for their female child and consider formal education as incompatible with religious values.

Cultural beliefs are shared values, custom practices and norms which are passed down across generations. Ahmed and Sulaiman (2022) found in their comparative study of sub-Saharan Africa that cultural practices reinforcing patriarchal norms are among the strongest predictors of low female enrolment. Adeyemi and Akintoye (2021) also confirmed that socio-cultural parenting values have significant effects on female enrolment and retention, especially in rural communities where parents hold traditional gender stereotypes. As observed by Efuengwa (2021), in some African societies, the education of girls is perceived as unnecessary or even counter-productive based on the assumption that a woman, primarily, is to be a wife and mother. Nwosu (2023) noted that cultural prescriptions in Igbo communities still restrict girls to domestic roles, thereby lowering their enrolment in school. With this, girls who have access to schooling will be limited thereby shaping parental decisions regarding whether or not to enrol their daughters in schools. Efuengwa (2021) reported that in the Nweli culture, early marriage significantly disrupts girl's education as married girls face challenges balancing academic responsibilities with household duties and often lack spousal support to continue their studies. Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2020) reported that early marriage and cultural rituals remain strong barriers to girls' education in parts of southwest Nigeria. This does not only limit educational attainment but also exposes young girls to the health risk of early child bearing, sabotaging both their academic and personal development.

Despite sustained national and international efforts to promote gender equality in education, the issue of low female students' enrolment in secondary schools persists across many rural communities in Nigeria, including Afijio Local Government Area of Oyo State. Statistical evidence and observations reveal that the frequency of female under-enrolment remains disproportionately high compared to male counterparts, particularly at the secondary school level where dropout rates among girls sharply increase (UNESCO, 2022; UBEC, 2022). The extent of this menace in Nigerian secondary schools, has reached the climax, in that when girls enrol in secondary schools, many of them drop out of the school system. Even those within the system are not regular in the school and some of them are being compelled to go to school. All these are manifesting in low female literacy rate, limited socio-economic mobility, and inter-generational cycles of poverty that affect women in the society. The implication of this problem on the society is that there will be continuous increase in the rate of illiteracy in the society. And where there is high rate of illiteracy, there will be high level of poverty.

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Many researchers have worked on how to solve this problem, that is low enrolment of female students in secondary schools, yet the problem persists. Some researchers looked into socio-economic background of the parents, educational background of the parents and community. But these researchers examine parental attitudes and cultural beliefs and how these influence the female students' enrolment in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government Area. Therefore, this study aims to critically examine the specific influence that parental attitudes and cultural belief play in determining female student enrolment in secondary schools in Afijio LGA, with the ultimate goal of informing culturally responsive and evidence-based educational policies.

Objectives of the study

- 1) Examine the level of enrolment of female secondary school students.
- 2) Examine the influence of parental attitudes on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government.
- 3) Investigate the influence of cultural beliefs on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government.
- 4) Identify the combined influence of parental attitudes and cultural beliefs on the academic progression of female students.

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant influence of parental attitudes on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools.

Ho2: There is no significant influence of cultural beliefs on female enrolment in secondary schools.

Ho3: There is no significant joint influence of parental attitude and cultural belief on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of this study comprised all parents and guardians of school-age girls in selected communities within Afijio Local Government Area. The focus included both urban and rural households, ensuring a broad representation across educational, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. A sample of 200 parents was drawn from the population using a stratified random sampling technique. The population was stratified based on location, educational level, and religious affiliation.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Parental Attitude and Cultural Belief toward Enrolment of Female Students Questionnaire (PACBEFSQ). The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A seeks demographic information of the respondents, while section B was sub-divided into three sub-sections, namely: level of enrolment of female secondary school students scale, parental attitudes on the enrolment of female students in secondary school scale, and cultural beliefs on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools. Each of the sub-sections contained five items which were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” The content and face validity of the instrument was ensured by experts. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.83 which shows internal consistency of the instrument was realized. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the research question while inferential statistic of multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Research question 1: What is the level of enrolment of female students in secondary schools?

Table 1: Level of enrolment of female students in secondary schools

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Girls in this community have the same chance to go to school as boys.	134 (67%)	50 (25%)	14 (7%)	2 (1%)	3.58	0.67
2	The number of girls going to secondary school has increased recently.	36 (18%)	104 (52%)	36 (18%)	24 (12%)	2.76	0.88
3	Most parents send their daughters to secondary school after primary school.	86 (43%)	72 (36%)	36 (18%)	6 (3%)	3.19	0.83
4	Many girls drop out of school before finishing secondary school.	62 (31%)	102 (51%)	34 (17%)	2 (1%)	3.12	0.71
5	School fees and other costs stop many girls from continuing schooling.	126 (63%)	44 (22%)	28 (14%)	2 (1%)	3.47	0.77
	Weighted Mean		3.22				

From the table 1, the highest mean score of 3.58 was recorded for the statement “Girls in this community have the same chance to go to school as boys,” indicating that most respondents agree that the female students have same chance to be educated. The statement with the lowest mean score (2.76) is “The number of girls going to secondary school has increased recently,” suggesting mixed perceptions and that improvements in enrolment are not yet consistent across communities. The mean scores of 3.19 and 3.12 for items three and four respectively show that while many parents are willing to send their daughters to secondary school, dropout rates remain significant, often linked to socio-cultural and economic barriers. Finally, the item on school fees and other costs had a mean score of 3.47, reflecting a strong consensus that financial challenges remain a critical obstacle to sustained female enrolment. Overall, the analysis reveals that although progress is being made in girls’ education, financial constraints and dropout rates still pose major challenges to female enrolment at the secondary school level.

Ho1: There is no significant influence of parental attitudes on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools.

Table 2: Regression analysis of parental attitude and cultural beliefs on female enrolment

Predictor	β (Beta)	T	Sig.	Decision
Parental attitude	0.42	4.82	0.000	Significant
Cultural beliefs	0.38	4.10	0.001	Significant
R = 0.61; R ² = 0.37; F(2,197) = 38.25; p = 0.000				Reject Ho

The regression result shows that parental attitude ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$) is positively correlated and significantly influence female enrolment in secondary schools. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that parents’ attitudes are significant determinants of girls’ enrolment in schools.

Ho2: There is no significant influence of cultural beliefs on female enrolment in secondary schools.

The result from table 2 indicates that cultural beliefs ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$) is also correlated and significantly influence female enrolment. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that traditions discouraging girls from schooling, early marriage, and preference for boys’ education play a key role in limiting girls’ access to secondary education.

Ho3: There is no significant joint influence of parental attitude and cultural beliefs on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools.

The result from table 2 shows $R^2 = 0.37$, which implies joint contribution was found between parental attitude and cultural belief on the enrolment of female students in public secondary schools in Afijio local government area of Oyo state. This means that 37% of the variance in female enrolment is explained by parental attitudes and cultural beliefs combined. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of the findings

The study reveals that girls in the community under study have the same chance to go to school as boys and that there are improvements in the enrolment of female students but not yet consistent across communities. It was revealed that many parents are willing to send their daughters to secondary school yet dropout rates remain significant, often linked to socio-cultural and economic barriers. Also, the study showed that financial challenges remain a critical obstacle to sustained female enrolment. These results align with UNESCO (2021), which reported that although sub-Saharan Africa has seen improvements in girls' school attendance, high dropout rates linked to poverty and gender expectations still undermine long-term retention. Similarly, Akinfaderin and Oladipo (2022) emphasized that financial burdens remain a major reason many girls withdraw from school before completing their studies.

Hypothesis one states that there is no significant influence of parental attitudes on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government Area. The findings of this study rejected the null hypothesis and revealed that parental attitudes significantly influence female enrolment in secondary schools. Negative perceptions such as the belief that girls do not need much education, fear of girls becoming "too exposed," or prioritizing boys' education over girls were found to directly hinder female participation. This suggests that parents' values and expectations strongly shape girls' educational opportunities. This result agrees with the findings of Okeke et al. (2022), who reported that parents' perception of girls' education in southeastern Nigeria determines whether daughters are enrolled and retained in school. Similarly, Umar (2021) observed, in northern Nigeria, that parental concerns about morality and domestic responsibilities limit girls' chances of progressing beyond primary school. Adeyemi and Akintoye (2021) also confirmed that socio-cultural parenting values have significant effects on female enrolment and retention, especially in rural communities where parents hold traditional gender stereotypes. Together, these studies emphasize that without reshaping parental attitudes,

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girls will continue to face structural barriers to secondary education, regardless of the availability of schools.

Hypothesis two stated that there is no significant influence of cultural beliefs on female enrolment in secondary schools in Afijio Local Government Area. The hypothesis was rejected, indicating that cultural beliefs significantly influence females' participation. Results showed that traditions such as early marriage, gendered norms that prioritize boys' education, and cultural events that interrupt schooling discourage girls from continuing their studies. This is consistent with Nwosu (2023) who noted that cultural prescriptions in Igbo communities still restrict girls to domestic roles, thereby lowering enrolment rates. Similarly, Ogunyemi and Adebayo (2020) reported that early marriage and cultural rituals remain strong barriers to girls' education in parts of southwest Nigeria. Internationally, Ahmed and Sulaiman (2022) found in their comparative study of sub-Saharan Africa that cultural practices reinforcing patriarchal norms are among the strongest predictors of low female enrolment.

Hypothesis three stated that there is no significant joint influence of parental attitude and cultural beliefs on the enrolment of female students in secondary schools. This hypothesis was also rejected. Regression analysis showed that the combined effect of parental attitudes and cultural beliefs significantly influences female enrolment. This implies that the decision to send girls to school is shaped not only by individual parental views but also by the wider cultural environment in which families live. This finding supports the argument of Eze and Okafor (2021), who reported that cultural norms and parental expectations jointly determine educational outcomes for girls in rural Nigeria. In a broader African context, Kebede (2020) found that the intersection of family-level decisions and community-level traditions strongly predicts whether girls in Ethiopia remain in school. Likewise, Chaudhry and Rahman (2021) concluded in their South Asian study that girls' enrolment is best explained by the combined influence of parental approval and prevailing socio-cultural beliefs. Finally, these studies emphasize that addressing one factor without the other may yield limited results. Effective strategies must therefore simultaneously challenge cultural barriers and transform parental attitudes to secure greater enrolment for girls.

Conclusion

From the findings, it can be concluded that parental attitudes and cultural beliefs remain powerful determinants of female students' access to secondary education in Afijio Local

Government Area. Negative parental perceptions about girls' education, coupled with deep-rooted cultural practices such as early marriage and prioritization of boys' schooling, continue to limit female participation. The study further concludes that while awareness about the importance of girls' education is growing, socio-economic pressures, household responsibilities, and traditional norms still exert significant influence on decision-making. Thus, improving female enrolment requires a multi-dimensional approach that addresses both parental mindset and cultural barriers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- 1) Government and NGOs should organize community campaigns to educate parents on the long-term advantage of educating girls, including economic empowerment.
- 2) Laws against early marriage and discriminatory cultural practices should be strictly enforced to safeguard girls' education.
- 3) Scholarships, grants, and fee waivers should be introduced for girls from low-income families to reduce the economic burden of schooling.
- 4) Traditional and religious leaders should be actively engaged to challenge cultural norms that discourage female education and to promote inclusive schooling.

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