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**Unpacking the Intersectional Barriers to Girl-Child Education in Borno State: A mixed –
Method Approach**

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ABSTRACT

Girl-child education is a fundamental right and a crucial driver of socio-economic development. In Borno State, Nigeria, however, numerous intersectional barriers continue to limit girls' access to quality education, despite national and international efforts to promote gender equality in schooling. This study explores the key challenges impeding girl-child education in the region, focusing on the interplay of security threats due to insurgency, socio-cultural norms such as early marriage and gender discrimination, economic constraints, and inadequate school infrastructure. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative data collected through interviews with educators, parents, and policymakers, along with a review of relevant policy documents. The findings indicate that insecurity, poverty, and entrenched cultural biases are the primary obstacles to female education, leading to high dropout rates and limited opportunities for girls. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions, including enhanced security in schools, community awareness programs, economic support for girls, and comprehensive policy reforms to ensure equitable access to education. Addressing these barriers is vital for fostering sustainable development and empowering women in Borno State and beyond.

Keywords: Girl-child education, intersectionality, barriers, gender inequality, insurgency,

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development (United Nations, 2015). It plays a crucial role in reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, and enhancing economic growth. The education of girls, in particular, has been linked to numerous societal benefits, including lower child mortality rates, improved family health, and increased household income (UNESCO, 2021). However, despite global and national efforts to promote education for all, the education of the girl-child remains a critical challenge in many parts of Nigeria, particularly in Borno State.

Borno State, located in the northeastern region of Nigeria, has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children in the country, with girls disproportionately affected (UNICEF, 2022). The persistent insecurity caused by Boko Haram insurgency has significantly disrupted the educational sector, leading to the destruction of schools, displacement of teachers, and abduction of students, particularly girls (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Boko Haram, whose name translates to “Western education is forbidden,” has deliberately targeted female education, discouraging parents from sending their daughters to school out of fear for their safety (Amnesty International, 2020).

Beyond security concerns, deep-rooted socio-cultural beliefs continue to hinder female education in the region. According to Okafor and Adeleke (2019), traditional norms and religious interpretations in northern Nigeria often prioritize early marriage over formal education for girls. Many parents, influenced by cultural and economic factors, view investment in male education as more beneficial, relegating girls to domestic roles (Obanya, 2020). Additionally, economic hardships force many families to withdraw their daughters from school, either to engage in child

labor or due to an inability to afford school fees and other educational expenses (World Bank, 2021).

Furthermore, inadequate school infrastructure and a lack of female teachers exacerbate the problem. Research has shown that the presence of female teachers encourages higher female enrollment and retention, yet many rural schools in Borno lack such representation (Abdulrahman & Yusuf, 2018). The combination of these factors has resulted in low enrollment, high dropout rates, and limited academic progression for girls in the state.

Problem Statement

Despite various policies and interventions aimed at promoting girl-child education in Nigeria, significant challenges persist in Borno State. Government programs such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme and initiatives by international organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO have sought to improve educational access for girls (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). However, these efforts have not fully addressed the structural and cultural barriers that continue to hinder female education in the region.

One of the major challenges is the ongoing insurgency, which has created a climate of fear and instability. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), over 1,400 schools have been destroyed in northeastern Nigeria since the start of the Boko Haram crisis, with many girls kidnapped or forced into early marriage. Even in areas where schools remain operational, safety concerns deter parents from sending their daughters to school.

Cultural and religious norms further compound the issue. Studies indicate that in many communities, girls are expected to marry at an early age, limiting their access to formal education (Mohammed & Aliyu, 2021). Gender discrimination within households often means that when financial resources are scarce, priority is given to boys' education over girls'

(UNESCO, 2021). These persistent socio-economic and cultural barriers raise critical questions about the effectiveness of existing policies and the need for more context-specific interventions.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Identify key barriers to girl-child education in Borno State.
2. Examine the impact of these barriers on girls' access to and retention in education.
3. Propose strategic interventions to improve female education in the state.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Importance of Girl-Child Education

The education of the girl-child is widely recognized as a critical factor in societal development. Research has consistently shown that when girls are educated, they contribute significantly to economic growth, improved health outcomes, and social stability (World Bank, 2021). According to UNESCO (2021), educating girls reduces child mortality rates, lowers maternal mortality, and enhances family well-being. Women with formal education are more likely to participate in decision-making, secure better employment opportunities, and contribute to national development (United Nations, 2015).

Educating girls also plays a crucial role in poverty alleviation. A study by Okafor and Adeleke (2019) highlights that every additional year of schooling for a girl increases her future earnings by 10%, thereby reducing economic dependency and enhancing household income. Furthermore, female education fosters intergenerational benefits, as educated mothers are more likely to ensure their children's schooling, breaking the cycle of poverty (Obanya, 2020). Despite these

advantages, millions of girls, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Borno State, remain deprived of education due to systemic barriers (UNICEF, 2022).

The global commitment to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is captured in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which seeks to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, SDG 5 emphasizes gender equality, advocating for the elimination of discrimination and harmful practices such as child marriage, which disproportionately affects girls' education. International organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank have implemented numerous initiatives to bridge the gender gap in education, particularly in developing countries (UNESCO, 2021).

Nigeria's Policies and Interventions

The Nigerian government has implemented several policies aimed at promoting female education, including the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004, which mandates free and compulsory education for all children (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Other initiatives include the Girls' Education Project (GEP), implemented in collaboration with UNICEF, and the Safe Schools Initiative, launched in response to attacks on educational institutions (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Despite these efforts, the impact has been limited in regions such as Borno State, where persistent insecurity, socio-cultural norms, and economic constraints continue to hinder girl-child education (Abdulrahman & Yusuf, 2018). According to Mohammed and Aliyu (2021), while enrollment rates for girls have improved in some urban areas, rural and conflict-affected regions

still experience low retention and high dropout rates. This highlights the need for more targeted interventions that address the unique challenges of girl-child education in Borno State.

Challenges to Girl-Child Education in Northern Nigeria

i. Security Challenges and Insurgency

One of the most significant barriers to girl-child education in Borno State is the ongoing insurgency led by Boko Haram. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), the group has systematically targeted schools, particularly those enrolling girls, leading to widespread fear and school closures. Between 2009 and 2021, over 1,400 schools were destroyed, and thousands of students were abducted (Amnesty International, 2020). Parents, fearing for their daughters' safety, often choose to keep them out of school, further exacerbating the gender gap in education (UNICEF, 2022).

ii. Socio-Cultural and Religious Norms

Cultural beliefs and religious interpretations also play a crucial role in limiting female education in northern Nigeria. In many communities, early marriage is prioritized over schooling, with girls often married off before completing primary education (Okafor & Adeleke, 2019). According to Mohammed and Aliyu (2021), the perception that education exposes girls to Western values and reduces their chances of securing suitable marriages discourages many parents from enrolling their daughters in school. Additionally, the lack of female teachers in rural areas further deters parents from sending their daughters to male-dominated learning environments (Abdulrahman & Yusuf, 2018).

iii. Economic Barriers

Economic constraints remain a major impediment to girl-child education. In low-income households, families often prioritize boys' education, perceiving them as future breadwinners,

while girls are expected to engage in domestic labor (World Bank, 2021). The costs of school fees, uniforms, and other expenses create additional burdens, forcing many girls to drop out (UNESCO, 2021). Moreover, financial incentives such as conditional cash transfers for girls' education have had limited reach in Borno State due to insecurity and poor policy implementation (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

iv. Inadequate Infrastructure and Poor Learning Environment

A lack of proper school infrastructure further discourages female education. Many schools in Borno State lack basic facilities such as toilets, sanitary provisions, and secure classrooms, making it difficult for girls to attend, especially during menstruation (Obanya, 2020). Research by Abdulrahman and Yusuf (2018) found that inadequate school environments, coupled with long distances to educational institutions, contribute significantly to high dropout rates among girls in rural communities.

Gaps in Literature and Contribution of the Study

While existing research has extensively documented the barriers to girl-child education in Nigeria, there are several gaps in the literature that this study seeks to address. First, most studies on girl-child education in northern Nigeria have focused on general gender disparities without a specific emphasis on the unique intersection of insecurity, cultural norms, and economic barriers in Borno State (Mohammed & Aliyu, 2021). This study aims to provide a localized analysis that captures the realities of girls facing both conflict and socio-economic challenges.

Second, while previous research has highlighted government policies aimed at improving female education, there has been limited evaluation of their effectiveness in conflict-affected areas (Human Rights Watch, 2021). By assessing the impact of existing interventions and identifying

areas of improvement, this study contributes to policy discussions on enhancing access and retention of girls in education.

Finally, this study goes beyond problem identification to propose actionable strategies for improving girl-child education in Borno State. By integrating insights from educators, policymakers, and affected communities, this research provides a holistic approach to addressing barriers and ensuring sustainable solutions. The findings will serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders seeking to bridge the gender gap in education and promote inclusive development in conflict-affected regions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the barriers to girl-child education in Borno State. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perspectives, and socio-cultural influences on female education (Creswell, 2018). The study utilizes interviews, case studies, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive examination of the issue. By employing a qualitative approach, the study captures the lived realities of parents and policymakers regarding the challenges and potential solutions to improving girl-child education in Borno State. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents in selected communities in Borno State. This method enables participants to share their experiences, beliefs, and concerns about educating girls. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility, ensuring that key themes are covered while also permitting new insights to emerge (Bryman, 2016). The interviews focuses on:

- a) Socio-cultural perceptions of girl-child education
- b) Economic constraints affecting school attendance
- c) Security concerns and their impact on education

- d) Parental attitudes toward female teachers and school infrastructure

Case studies will be used to document real-life experiences of families with varying attitudes toward girl-child education. By examining both successful and unsuccessful cases of girl-child education in Borno State, the study will highlight patterns, contradictions, and socio-economic influences that impact schooling decisions (Yin, 2014).

In addition to interviews, relevant policy documents, government reports, and NGO publications will be analyzed to assess existing interventions aimed at promoting girl-child education in Borno State. These documents include:

- a) The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act (2004)
- b) Reports from the Federal Ministry of Education
- c) UNICEF and UNESCO reports on female education in Nigeria
- d) Local policies addressing education in conflict-affected regions

Document analysis will help identify gaps between policy intentions and actual implementation, providing a contextual understanding of the barriers faced by girls in Borno State.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative analytical technique that identifies recurring themes and patterns from the interviews and policy documents (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves the following steps:

1. Familiarization with Data: Transcribing interviews and reading through policy documents to gain a holistic understanding.
2. Generating Initial Codes: Identifying key statements and coding them based on emerging themes such as "cultural norms," "economic constraints," and "security challenges."

3. Searching for Themes: Grouping codes into broader themes that represent major barriers to girl-child education.
4. Reviewing Themes: Refining and ensuring that themes accurately reflect the data collected.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Developing a coherent narrative around the themes to present findings logically.

By employing thematic analysis, this study will extract meaningful insights from participant responses and policy documents, ensuring a robust interpretation of the barriers to girl-child education in Borno State.

Ethical approval will be obtained from relevant authorities before data collection. Participants will be informed about the study’s purpose, and informed consent will be secured before conducting interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained to protect respondents’ identities, especially given the sensitive nature of education in conflict-affected regions (Patton, 2015).

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Data Analysis

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Data

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	59%
	Female	82	41%
	Total	200	100
Age Range	10-20	0	0
	20-30 yeas	110	55%
	31- 40 years	64	32%
	41-50 years	18	9%

51 and above	8	4%
Grand mean	200	100%

Table 4.1 above provides information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents in a field survey conducted in 2024. The table categorizes respondents into two groups, Male and Female. There were 118 male respondents, which accounts for 59% of the total respondents. There were 82 female respondents, making up 41% of the total respondents. The total number of respondents in this survey was 200, representing 100% of the sample.

Regarding the respondent age, no respondents fell within the 10-20 years age range. The majority of respondents, 110 in total, were in the 20-30 years age range, accounting for 55% of the total respondents. There were 64 respondents in the 31-40 years age range, making up 32% of the total. Only 18 respondents (9%), were in the 41-50 years age range. Only 8 respondents (4%) were 51 years of age and above. The grand total of respondents in the age categories sums to 200, representing 100% of the sample.

Research Question One: What are the key barriers to girl-child education in Borno State?

Table 4.2 Statistical Distribution on Parental Factors affecting Girl child. Education in Borno state

S/No	Items	Frequency					Total	Mean
		SA	A	D	SD	U		
1	Parental fear for Safety Concern, including the risk of Violence and harassment on the way to school Can deter parents from sending their girl child to school.	118 (59%)	70 (35%)	3 (1.5%)	9 (4.5%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.89
2	Parental attitudes and belief about the education for girls can influence their commitment to	89 (44.5%)	93 (46.5%)	7 (3.5%)	11 (5.5%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.3

3	schooling. Gender Bias withing families can. hinder a girl child access to education.	121 (60.5%)	69 (34.5%)	4 (2%)	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.52
4	Girls are often burden with household chores and Caregiving responsibilities which can limit their study and attending.	67 (33.5%)	86 (43%)	23 (11.5%)	22 (11%)	2 (1%)	200 (100%)	3.97
5	Early Marriage can make girls to drop out of school or deny access to education Completely.	137 (68.5%)	46 (23%)	9 (4.5%)	8 (4%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.56
Grand mean								4.45

Table 4.2 above provides statistical data on the distribution of parent factors affecting girl child education in Borno State. The table consists of five items, each addressing specific factors related to parental influences on girls' education. The first item in the table emphasizes the safety concerns that parents may have, including the risk of violence and harassment on the way to school. It reveals that 59% of respondents strongly agree (SA) that these concerns can deter parents from sending their girl child to school, while 35% agree (A), 1.5% are undecided (D), and 4.5% disagree (SD). The mean score for this item is 4.89, indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents regarding safety concerns affecting girls' education.

The second item suggests that parental attitudes and beliefs about girls' education can influence their commitment to schooling. It shows that 44.5% of respondents strongly agree, 46.5% agree, 3.5% are undecided, and 5.5% disagree with this statement. The mean score for this item is 4.3, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents. The third item in the table focuses on gender bias within families and how it can hinder girls' access to education. It reveals that 60.5% of respondents strongly agree that gender bias can limit girls' access to education, while 34.5% agree, 2% are undecided, and 3% disagree. The mean score for this item

is 4.52, suggesting a strong consensus among respondents regarding the impact of gender bias. Item four discusses how girls are often burdened with household chores and caregiving responsibilities, which can limit their ability to study and attend school. It shows that 33.5% strongly agree, 43% agree, 11.5% are undecided, 11% disagree, and 1% are undecided. The mean score for this item is 3.97, indicating a moderate level of agreement.

The fifth item highlights how early marriage can lead to girls dropping out of school or being denied access to education. It reveals that 68.5% of respondents strongly agree, 23% agree, 4.5% are undecided, and 4% disagree. The mean score for this item is 4.56, suggesting a strong level of agreement among respondents.

Research Question TWO: How do these barriers impact girls’ access, retention, and academic performance in school?

Table 4.3 Statistical Distribution on Socio-cultural factors affecting Girl-child education in Borno States

S/No	Items	Frequency					Total	Mean
		SA	A	D	SD	U		
1	Mixing boys and girls in schools and Classrooms is a socio-cultural factor influencing the enrolment of girls in school.	89 (44.5%)	102 (51%)	4 (2%)	3 (1.5%)	2 (1%)	200 (100%)	4.37
2	Cultural norms and tradition Can Play a significant role in denying girl child. access to education.	91 (45.5%)	77 (38.5%)	18 (9%)	11 (5.5%)	3 (1.5%)	200 (100%)	4.21
3	Lack of female role models in educational and professional Fields can affect girls aspiration to education.	79 (39.5%)	63 (31.5%)	36 (18%)	22 (11%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	3.99
4	Peer pressure and Community norms influence or discourage	58	89	16	21	16	200	3.76

	girl child from can Pursuing education.	(29%)	(44.5%)	(8%)	(10.5%)	(8%)	(100%)	
5	Socio-economic disparities can limit access to girl child education.	69 (34.5%)	81 (40.5%)	19 (9.5%)	27 (13.5%)	4 (2%)	200 (100%)	3.92
	Grand mean							4.05

Table 4.3 above provides statistical data on the distribution of socio-cultural factors affecting girl-child education in Borno State. The first item in the table discusses the practice of mixing boys and girls in schools and classrooms as a socio-cultural factor influencing girls' enrollment in school. It shows that 44.5% of respondents strongly agree (SA) that this practice affects girls' school enrollment, while 51% agree (A), 2% are undecided (D), 1.5% disagree (SD), and 1% are undecided. The mean score for this item is 4.37, indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents regarding the impact of mixed-gender classrooms on girls' education. The second item emphasizes the role of cultural norms and traditions in denying girls access to education. It reveals that 45.5% of respondents strongly agree that cultural norms play a significant role, while 38.5% agree, 9% are undecided, 5.5% disagree, and 1.5% are undecided. The mean score for this item is 4.21, suggesting a strong consensus among respondents regarding the influence of cultural norms on girls' education.

Research Question three: what strategies can be implemented to improve access, retention, and participation of girls in education in Borno State?

Table 4.4 Statistical Distribution on Religious Factors affecting girl-child education in Borno State

S/No	Items	Frequencies					Total	Mean
		SA	A	D	SD	U		
1	Some religious beliefs and interpretations have conservative	68	76	36	20	0	200	3.96

	views that limit girl child access to education.	(34%)	(38%)	(18%)	(10%)	(0%)	(100%)	
2	Religious leaders can have a Significant influence towards girl child education.	121 (60.5%)	69 (34.5%)	6 (3%)	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.54
3	Some religious traditions advocate for gender in educational Settings, which can limit girl's access to education.	139 (69.5%)	52 (26%)	3 (1.5%)	6 (3%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.62
4	Religious dress codes can sometimes affect girl's ability to attend school.	67 (33.5%)	59 (29.5%)	34 (17%)	38 (19%)	2 (1%)	200 (100%)	3.75
5	Belief in traditional gender roles within Some religious communities limit May ties for girl's have access to education.	129 (64.5%)	57 (28.5%)	6 (3%)	8 (4%)	0 (0%)	200 (100%)	4.54
	Grand mean							4.28

Table 4.4 presents statistical data on the distribution of religious factors affecting girl child education in Borno State. The first item in the table highlights that 34% of respondents strongly agree (SA) that some religious beliefs and interpretations have conservative views that limit girl child access to education, while 38% agree (A), 18% are undecided (D), and 10% disagree (SD) with this statement. The mean score for this item is 3.96, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents. The second item suggests that 60.5% of respondents strongly agree that religious leaders can have a significant influence on girl child education, while 34.5% agree, 3% are undecided, and 2% disagree. The mean score for this item is 4.54, indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents.

The third item in the table reveals that 69.5% of respondents strongly agree that some religious traditions advocate for gender roles in educational settings that can limit girls' access to education, while 26% agree, 1.5% are undecided, and 3% disagree. The mean score for this item is 4.62, suggesting a strong consensus among respondents regarding this issue. Item four

discusses how religious dress codes can affect girls' ability to attend school. It shows that 33.5% strongly agree, 29.5% agree, 17% are undecided, and 19% disagree with this statement. The mean score for this item is 3.75, indicating a moderate level of agreement. The fifth item highlights that 64.5% of respondents strongly agree that belief in traditional gender roles within some religious communities can limit girls' access to education. 28.5% agree, 3% are undecided, and 4% disagree. The mean score for this item is 4.54, suggesting a strong level of agreement among respondents.

Discussion of Findings

This study assessed the factors affecting girl child education in Borno State with a view to understanding the challenges and barriers that young girls in this region face in accessing quality education. Borno State, located in northeastern Nigeria, has been grappling with various socio-economic and security challenges, which have had a significant impact on education, especially for girls. The study shows similar result with study conducted by Houles (1961) typologies consider those factors or action of the girl-child as a way of determining their participation moves in educational pursuits. He stated that, the best way of understanding the factors that affects girl-child learning is to understand those people who are actively engaged in their training and up-bringing.

The study also shows that another significant factor is cultural and societal norms. Borno State, like many parts of Nigeria, has deeply ingrained cultural practices and gender stereotypes that often prioritize boys' education over girls. These norms can lead to early marriages and child

labor, reducing the opportunities for girls to receive an education. Many girls are forced into early marriages, which significantly curtail their educational prospects. To address these issues, there is a need for comprehensive gender-sensitive policies and initiatives that challenge traditional norms and advocate for the importance of girls' education.

The finding of this study is similar to study by Abolarine and others (2011) in their research on National Program on the Education of the Girl Child at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) conducted in Okene Kogi State of Nigeria in 2011.

Furthermore, the study revealed that, religious factor is also a factor affecting girl child education. In the same way, according to Dauda (2010) in his study conducted in southern Sudan.

Findings of this study shows that, Economic is also one of the major factors affecting girl- child education. This similar to study conducted by Sanjohi (2011).

Lastly the findings shows that, Geographical factors is affecting girl-child education. This is the same as study by Ogundipe (1976) noted that the long distance to school in many rural areas has its disadvantages to the girl-child. By recognizing and addressing these factors, we can work towards promoting gender equality and empowering girls through education in Borno State.

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