

Socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors influencing girl-child dropout and strategies for enhancing secondary education in rural areas of Kwara and Osun States, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Girl-child education is essential for societal development and economic growth, yet dropout rates among girls remain a significant challenge in rural areas of Kwara and Osun States, Nigeria. This study examines the socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to the high dropout rates among girl-child students in public secondary schools. A multi-stage sampling technique which involved a first and second stage was employed to select two (2) local governments from each state and 240 household heads across the study areas, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. Data collection was conducted using a well-structured questionnaire, and the results were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores. The findings revealed several critical factors influencing dropout rates, including early marriage ($\bar{x} = 2.52$), high schooling costs ($\bar{x} = 2.42$), frequent absenteeism ($\bar{x} = 2.34$), low household income ($\bar{x} = 2.29$), negative teacher attitudes ($\bar{x} = 2.20$), excessive household work ($\bar{x} = 2.18$), female involvement in domestic chores ($\bar{x} = 2.15$), and entrenched cultural beliefs ($\bar{x} = 2.03$). These factors highlight the multifaceted barriers girl-child students face in accessing and continuing their education. The study emphasises the need for targeted interventions to mitigate these barriers. Based on these findings, the study recommends the implementation of strict policies and legal frameworks to discourage early and adolescent marriage, alongside community-based sensitisation programs to raise awareness about the importance of girl-child education. Additionally, making education more affordable and accessible through scholarships or financial support programs can help reduce the economic burden on families. Addressing these issues is vital for improving educational outcomes, fostering gender equality, and empowering girls to contribute to national development in rural Nigeria.

Keywords: Cultural influences, dropout rates, girl-child education, institutional factors, rural schools, socioeconomic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right and a critical tool for societal development. According to the World Bank (2023), girls' education is not just about sending girls to school; it also ensures that these girls learn in a secure environment, complete all levels of education, and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the labour market. Educated girls gain socio-economic and life skills

essential for adapting to a changing world, making informed decisions about their lives, and contributing meaningfully to their communities and the global economy. Despite this, millions of girls, particularly in developing countries, face numerous barriers that hinder their access to education (Blossom, 2023). Globally, the issue of school dropouts has drawn considerable attention from researchers

and policymakers alike. Dropouts are typically defined as students who leave school without completing their education or transitioning to another educational institution (Beatrice and Confidence, 2016). This phenomenon not only adversely affects individuals' personal lives but also has a profound impact on societal development and economic growth (Archambault *et al.*, 2022; Sumardi, 2020). For girls, the impact of dropping out is particularly severe, as it perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality, limiting opportunities for empowerment and advancement.

In order to convince people to give more attention to the education of girl-child, the general public schools should get more active in issues pertaining to it by improving teacher professional development, fixing the infrastructure gaps, and raising awareness (Blossom, 2023).

Statement of the problem

Every citizen has a fundamental need for education. However, when it comes to guaranteeing hundred per cent literacy rates worldwide, dropout rates have been at the top. In Nigeria, the challenge of girl-child education is especially pronounced. According to the World Bank, Nigeria has over 12-15 million out-of-school children, a significant proportion of whom are girls, particularly in rural areas and the northern parts of the country. These regions record the lowest rates of secondary school completion among girls, in stark contrast to southern Nigeria (World Bank, 2023). Key barriers to girl-child education include early marriage, cultural beliefs, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure (Bangura and Mambo, 2023).

In Kwara and Osun States, the dropout rates among rural girl-child students remain alarmingly high, with many unable to complete their education due to these barriers. This not only limits their personal development but also affects the overall socio-economic growth of their communities. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including improving teacher training, addressing infrastructure deficits, and raising awareness about the importance of girls' education.

Establishing safe and supportive learning environments for girls is critical. Schools must be equipped with adequate resources, and teachers must be trained to provide guidance and support (Shahriar, 2022). Community involvement is also vital in fostering an environment that values and prioritizes education for all children, especially girls.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to examine the several factors contributing to the high dropout rates among rural girls in public secondary schools in Kwara and Osun States, Nigeria. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors influencing girl-child dropout rates in public secondary schools in rural Kwara and Osun States?
2. How do these factors affect girl-child participation and continuation in secondary education in the study area?
3. What strategies can effectively enhance girl-child retention and educational outcomes in rural public secondary schools in Kwara and Osun States?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are to examine the factors influencing rural girl-child dropout rates and to identify strategies that can enhance girl-child education in the rural areas of Kwara and Osun States. Therefore, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To examine the socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors influencing girl-child dropout rates in public secondary schools in rural Kwara and Osun States.
2. To assess the impact of these factors on girl-child participation in secondary education within the study area.
3. To identify and evaluate strategies for improving girl-child retention and educational outcomes in rural public secondary schools in Kwara and Osun States.

Significance of study

This study holds significant value for various stakeholders by shedding light on the challenges and opportunities associated with girl-child education in rural areas of Kwara and Osun States, Nigeria. It will benefit rural female students, parents, and educators by emphasizing the importance of educating girls and dispelling entrenched beliefs that hinder their education. Furthermore, the findings will provide valuable insights for government officials, school administrators, and policymakers to enhance strategies that promote rural girls' school retention and completion.

By disseminating the findings through educational conferences, seminars, and publications in academic journals, the study aims to inspire rural parents to actively support their daughters' education. For educational planners and administrators, the research will serve as a guide for formulating effective policies to reduce dropout rates among rural secondary school girls, fostering gender equality and societal advancement.

This research will also inform policymakers about the critical role of girl-child education in driving socioeconomic development, encouraging them to implement targeted interventions and remedial programs for dropouts. Educators will gain knowledge on identifying at-risk students and tailoring their teaching approaches to address specific challenges faced by rural girls, enhancing their academic success.

Additionally, the study will provide a robust foundation for further research into rural girl-child education, offering valuable data and insights for scholars who wish to expand the scope of investigation on this critical issue. By addressing the multifaceted barriers to girl-child education, this research contributes to improving the efficiency of the educational system and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Dropout concept and its influencing factors

School dropout represents a critical challenge to educational systems worldwide, leading to economic and social repercussions. According to Bravo (2023), dropout trends often fluctuate due to multiple factors, such as financial constraints, program difficulty, and health issues. Despite efforts like free tuition policies in many regions, financial difficulties remain the most cited reason for students leaving school prematurely. Similarly, emotional stress and academic burnout are significant contributors, particularly in low-income settings (Vera and Álvarez, 2022).

In Malawi, for instance, the secondary school completion rate for students from the poorest households is alarmingly low at 3%, compared to the 23% national average (UNICEF, 2022a). Such disparities highlight the interplay between socioeconomic status and access to education. Pokharel (2022) similarly notes that children from low-income families are more likely to engage in economic activities to support their households, prioritizing immediate income over long-term educational goals. Educational institutions also play a pivotal role in dropout prevention. Programs with strong academic support systems, such as mentoring and counselling services, have consistently demonstrated lower dropout rates (Bravo, 2023). However, where institutional support is weak, students often feel alienated or overwhelmed, leading to higher attrition rates (Simić and Krstić, 2017).

The role of gender and cultural norms

Gender-related factors compound dropout issues in many developing countries. Cultural norms often deprioritize education for girls, especially in rural areas, leading to early marriage or household responsibilities taking precedence over schooling (Dhiman, 2023). For example, in Northern Nigeria, patriarchal traditions significantly limit girls' school enrollment and retention, despite national policies promoting gender equity in education (Hafsta, 2023). Hafsta further highlights that educational campaigns tailored to local communities can effectively counteract these cultural barriers.

Emotional and psychological factors

The psychological toll of academic pressure also contributes to dropout rates. Research by Vera and Álvarez (2022) underscores the impact of academic burnout, where stress, anxiety, and a lack of motivation drive students to leave their studies. This phenomenon, described as "academic exhaustion," often overlaps with low self-esteem and fear of failure, particularly among first-generation students or those lacking adequate family support (Perry *et al.*, 2017).

Moreover, depression is frequently linked to school dropouts. A study involving 1,100 students across ten U.S. universities found that depressive symptoms were a significant predictor of academic withdrawal (Lorenzo-Quiles *et al.*, 2023). Similar findings were reported in other studies, emphasizing the importance of mental health resources in schools and universities (Bravo, 2023).

Strategies to mitigate dropout

Effective dropout prevention strategies focus on addressing both systemic and individual factors. For instance, targeted financial aid programs and scholarships can alleviate economic pressures for underprivileged students, as observed in studies from the Philippines and Sub-Saharan Africa (Bravo, 2023; UNICEF, 2022b). Additionally, flexible school schedules and vocational training options have proven successful in retaining students who balance education with work or family obligations (Simić and Krstić, 2017).

Community engagement also plays a vital role. Hafsta (2023) emphasizes that inclusive policies, coupled with grassroots advocacy, can foster a supportive environment for at-risk students. Educational campaigns that involve parents and local leaders are particularly effective in areas where cultural norms hinder school attendance.

Finally, the integration of technology in education has shown promise in reducing dropout rates. Digital learning platforms enable students to access resources remotely, mitigating barriers such as long commutes or unsafe school environments (World Bank, 2023). Such initiatives are especially relevant in the context of global disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the need for adaptable educational systems.

Theoretical framework

This study builds upon two key theoretical perspectives: the *Classical Theory of Equal Opportunities* and *Social Darwinism*, which collectively provide a robust foundation for understanding the dynamics of girl-child education and dropout rates.

The *Classical Theory of Equal Opportunities* posits that

all individuals, irrespective of their social background, gender, race, or religion, should have equal access to quality education. It emphasizes that educational success should be determined solely by individual effort and ability, free from systemic barriers or discrimination (Winny and Polycarp, 2023). This theory underscores the critical need for an equitable educational system where opportunities are evenly distributed, and basic education is both free and compulsory. Such a system ensures that marginalized groups, including girls in rural areas, can overcome structural disadvantages to achieve their full potential. According to Effiom *et al.* (2021), equitable access to education can dismantle cycles of poverty and inequality, particularly in rural communities. Similarly, Smith and Olanrewaju (2022) highlight that ensuring equal opportunities in education fosters societal development and promotes gender equity.

Complementing this perspective, *Social Darwinism* offers a lens for analysing how societal competition and survival dynamics influence access to education. Originating from Darwinian principles applied in sociological contexts, this theory explains how cultural, social, and economic forces perpetuate unequal access to resources, including education (Smith and Ray, 2021). In the context of girl-child education, Social Darwinism highlights how families in resource-constrained settings often prioritize boys' education over girls' due to survival-based decision-making strategies (Hafsta, 2023). For instance, traditional beliefs in many Nigerian communities assign domestic and caregiving roles to girls, reinforcing the perception that formal education for girls is less critical than for boys (Ja *et al.*, 2022). This underscores the need for targeted interventions to address cultural and economic barriers.

Together, these theories emphasize the necessity of a fair and inclusive educational system as a cornerstone of societal progress. The *Classical Theory of Equal Opportunities* advocates for universal access to education, while *Social Darwinism* offers insights into the societal mechanisms that either hinder or enable access for marginalized groups. Researchers such as Archambault *et al.* (2022) and Pokharel (2022) argue that systemic barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and entrenched cultural norms are significant factors affecting school dropout rates among girls. Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted approaches that combine financial support, awareness campaigns, and structural reforms. Moreover, Blossom (2023) emphasizes the importance of creating supportive learning environments and raising community awareness to dismantle resistance rooted in traditional beliefs. Shahriar (2022) advocates for substantial financial and infrastructural investments in rural education systems, which can help mitigate the adverse effects of poverty and ensure girls remain in school. Rayaprol *et al.* (2023) suggest that fostering gender-sensitization programs for teachers and parents can help reshape societal attitudes toward girls' education, contributing to long-term gender parity.

These theoretical underpinnings provide a framework for understanding the systemic barriers and cultural factors that perpetuate inequality in education. They also highlight the urgent need for policy interventions that empower girls and promote equitable access to education as a means of fostering sustainable societal development.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The study was conducted in Kwara and Osun States, Nigeria. Kwara State has a population of 2.4 million people, 70% of whom are peasant farmers (KWSG, 2006). It was chosen based on a report ranking it the sixth poorest in Nigeria (LSMS, 2004). The state is also noted for having a low level of education, which negatively impacts the well-being of rural households (NPC, 2008). Based on its agro-ecological characteristics, it is classified into four regions. Zones A, B, C, and D. Kwara State is home to a variety of ethnic groups that live in both rural and urban areas. Like Nigeria, it bears the burden of educationally disadvantaged groups, including some local government regions, girl-child, and perhaps boy-child groups. The state government manages around 220 public secondary schools, 1000 elementary schools, three colleges of education, and one polytechnic. The Kwara State educational system consists of six-year elementary school cycles, three-year junior and senior secondary cycles, and a three- to four-year tertiary cycle (Figure 1).

On August 27, 1991, Osun State was formed by dividing Oyo State. The state has an area of approximately 14,875 square kilometres and is bordered by Kwara, Ogun, Ondo, and Oyo States in the north and west, respectively. Until March 2017, the state had 30 Local Government Areas (LGA) and one Area Office. Then, 30 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) and five administrative offices were created. The state has the following educational institutions: 1,277 public elementary schools, seven schools for special needs, one secondary school for special needs, 236 middle schools, 131 middle/high schools, 121 high schools, nine technical colleges, two colleges of education, one polytechnic, one college of technology, and one state university with six campuses in the state's six zones. The LAUTECH College of Medicine is located in Osogbo. The state has federal academic institutions like the Federal Government Colleges in Ikirun and Ipetumodu, the Federal Science and Technical College in Ilesa, the Federal Polytechnic in Ede, and the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) in Ile-Ife (Figure 2).

Sampling technique and sample size

The multistage sampling approach was adopted in this investigation. The first step featured a random selection of two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) from Osun State

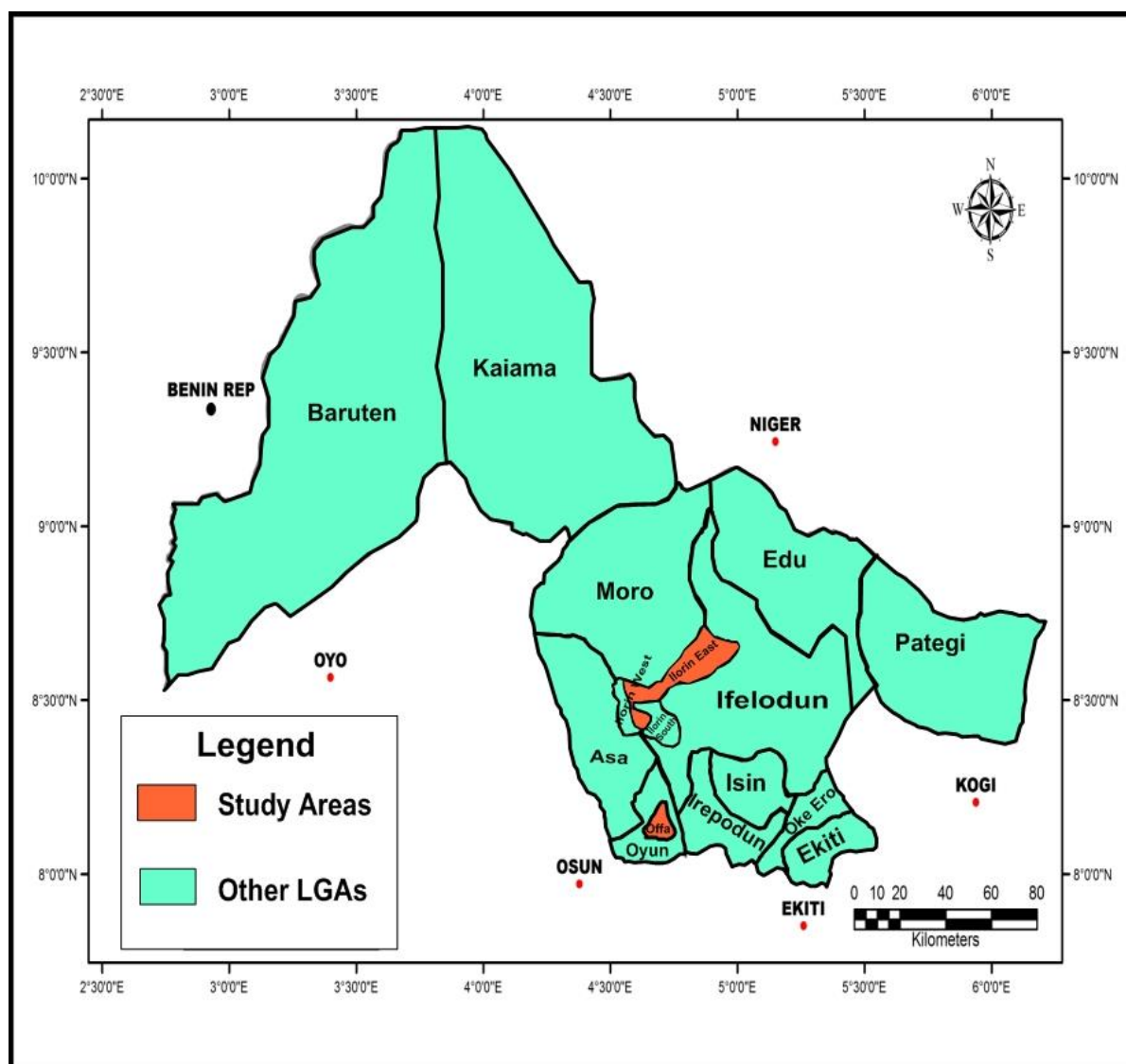


Figure 1. Map Kwara State (Source: Google map, 2023).

and two (2) from Kwara State, for a total of four. Ayedaade and Ife North Local Government Areas were picked from among thirty (30) LGAs in Osun State, while Ilorin East and Offa were chosen from among sixteen (16) LGAs in Kwara State.

The second stage involved the purposive selection of sixty (60) household heads from each local government that have girl-child since the study is about girl-child. This implies that a total of 240 respondents constituted the sample size for the study.

Instrument of data collection

This study included original data from a primary and secondary source. The primary data were obtained through a well-structured questionnaire that was

administered to household heads via an interview schedule; focus group discussions were used to obtain information from females; and secondary sources included journals, textbooks, reports, and other relevant published materials, including the internet.

Validity of instrument

The content validity of the research instrument was used to determine the content appropriateness of data collection, ensuring that the instrument measured what it was designed to measure. The written instrument was provided to Agricultural Extension professionals for assessment and modifications. The instrument's validity was evaluated alongside the study's objectives and hypotheses.

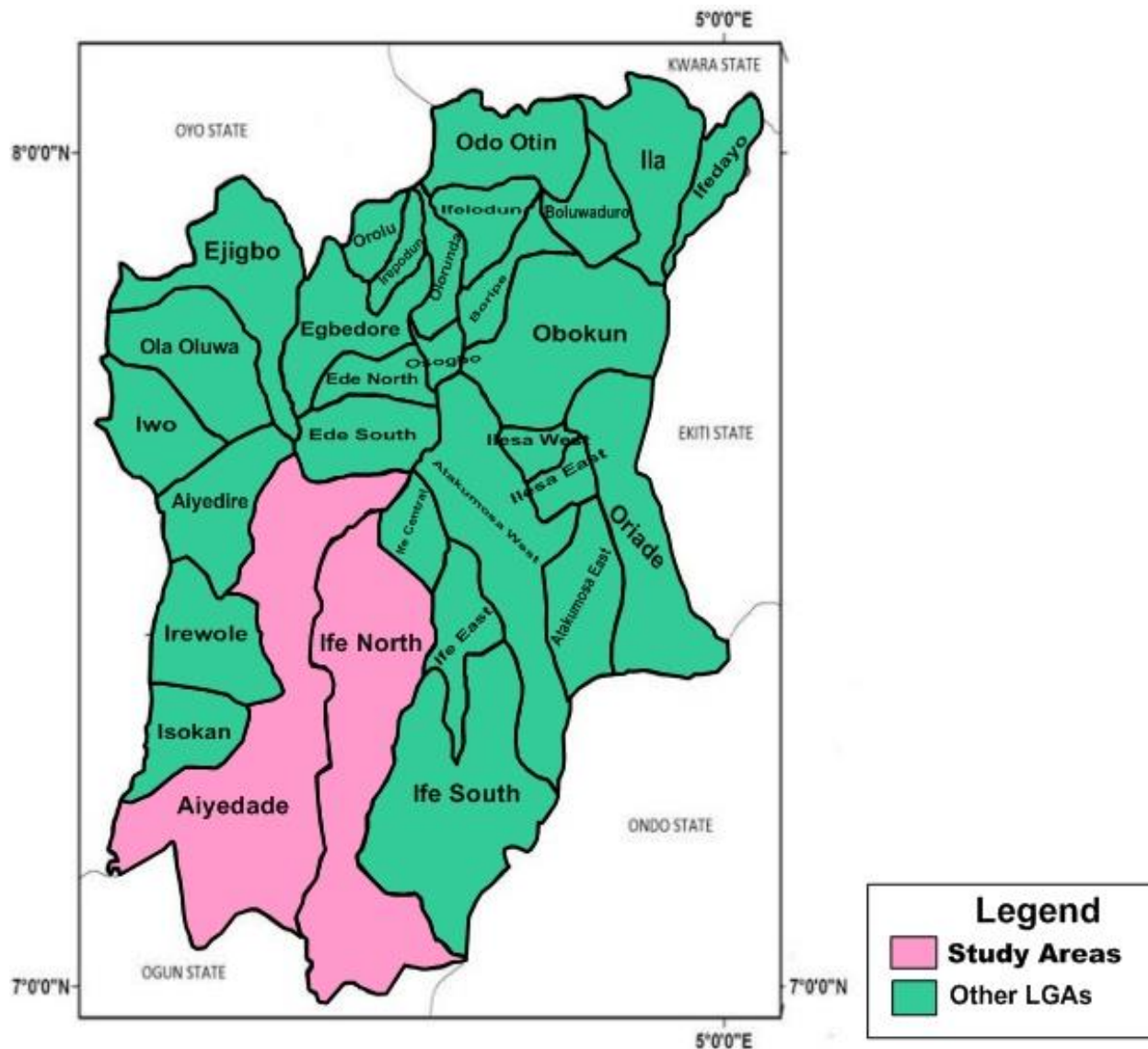


Figure 2. Map of Osun State (Source: Google map, 2023).

Reliability

The study instrument's consistency was determined using a test-retest procedure. This was accomplished by distributing the questionnaire to randomly selected public secondary schools and household heads who were not in the study area. The administration's results were then analyzed to determine whether or not the instrument was dependable.

Data analysis

The data collected from the structured questionnaires were carefully analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics,

including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, were employed to summarize and interpret the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors influencing girl-child dropout rates in public secondary schools within the rural areas of Kwara and Osun States.

To evaluate the extent to which each factor influenced dropout rates, mean scores were calculated for individual variables, and their significance was ranked. For example, economic factors like early marriage (mean = 2.52), high schooling costs (mean = 2.42), and absenteeism (mean = 2.34) were identified as major contributors to dropout rates, with a benchmark for classification being a mean score ≥ 2.5 as high, $2.0 \leq \text{mean} < 2.5$ as moderate, and < 2.0 as low.

Additionally, the strategies to mitigate dropout rates were assessed by analysing responses to Likert-scale

Table 1. Factors Influencing rural girl-child dropout of public secondary

Factors	Not a factor	Minor factor	Major factor	Mean	Rank
Socioeconomic factors					
Parental Inane	48(20.0)	75(31.3)	117(48.8)	2.29	4
School costs	33(13.8)	74(30.8)	133(55.4)	2.42	2
Household level factors (Cultural factors)					
Female involvement in household chores	37(15.4)	136(56.7)	67(27.9)	2.15	6
School level factors (Institutional factor)					
Extracurricular activities	127(52.9)	57(23.8)	56(23.3)	1.74	8
Lack of female teachers in school	81(33.8)	115(47.9)	44(18.3)	1.85	7
Absenteeism	28(11.7)	102(42.5)	110(45.8)	2.34	3
Feminine facilities in schools	107(44.6)	102(42.5)	24(10.0)	1.65	9
Teacher's attitude	34(14.2)	123(51.2)	83(34.6)	2.27	5
Cultural factors					
Early marriage	26(10.8)	62(25.8)	152(53.3)	2.52	1

Mean=2.0 (less than or equal to 2.0=Low, greater than or equal to 2.5=High (Source: Field survey, 2023).

statements, where mean scores ≥ 2.0 were classified as favourable strategies. The strategies included parental sensitization on the importance of girl-child education (mean = 3.30) and financial empowerment of families (mean = 3.18), among others.

This combination of descriptive tools provided insights into the magnitude and ranking of barriers and strategies associated with girl-child dropout in rural schools. The results were presented in tables and charts for clarity and ease of interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic and cultural factors influencing rural girl-child drop out of public secondary schools

Data in Table 1 shows the mean scores of the socioeconomic and cultural factors influencing rural girl-child dropout of public secondary schools. According to the household heads, the factors influencing rural girl-child drop out of public secondary schools are; early marriage ($\bar{x}=2.52$), schooling cost ($\bar{x}=2.42$), absenteeism ($\bar{x}=2.34$) and parents' income ($\bar{x}=2.29$). When the schooling cost is higher than what parents could afford, it could lead to the girl-child absence from school and might be the major determinant of early marriage by the girl-child. This agrees with Effiom *et al.* (2021) who discovered that girls have no access to education because parents in Nigeria do not send them to school because of their income. Absenteeism is one of the determinants of the frequent availability of students in public schools. The absence rate of students is highly pronounced in public secondary schools (Emore, 2017).

The other factors that highly influence girl-child drop-out

of secondary school education are, teacher's attitude ($\bar{x}=2.27$) and female involvement in household chores ($\bar{x}=2.15$). The implication of this is that, when teachers are unfriendly, unapproachable, and aggressive to students, it could lead to girl-child losing interest in coming to school and later deciding to sit at home. This study supports Hafsta (2023) who says that teachers' attitudes and the way they teach students in class can stop the girls from coming to school due to the unfriendly environment.

Conversely, factors that have no influence on girl-child drop out of secondary school education include, inadequate female teachers in school ($\bar{x}=1.85$), extra-curricular attitude ($\bar{x}=1.74$) and feminine facilities ($\bar{x}=1.65$). These also affect girl-child secondary school education but not in high extent.

Perceived strategies that aid rural girl-child secondary school education

Table 2 reveals the respondents' responses to strategies that aid rural girl-child secondary school education in the study area. It showed that respondents agreed that parents need appeal and counselling on the importance of girl-child student education ($\bar{x}=3.30$), and there should be sensitization of parents about the values of educating a girl-child ($\bar{x}=3.22$). A study by Ja *et al.* (2022) in Northern Nigeria explored the effects of parental counselling and community sensitization on girl-child school attendance. They found that parental attitudes positively shifted when exposed to counselling and sensitization programs. This aligns with the current findings, emphasizing that counselling and sensitization on the importance of girl-child education can increase enrollment and reduce dropout rates. There should be adequate funding from

Table 2. Perceived strategies that aid rural girl-child secondary school education.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagreed	Mean
Parents need appeal and counselling on the importance of girl-child student education	113(47.1)	98(140.8)	18(37.5)	11(4.6)	3.30
Families need to be empowered Financially	71(29.6)	145(60.4)	21(8.8)	3(1.2)	3.18
Schools in the rural areas must not send girls home early to avoid disappearance	26(10.8)	111(46.3)	67(27.9)	36(15)	2.53
There is need for more boarding schools for girls	13(5.4)	26(10.8)	97(40.4)	104(43.4)	1.78
Religious organizations need to be used for sensitization workshops and messages	49(20.4)	83(34.6)	87(36.3)	21(8.7)	2.67
There is need to involve NGOs, and community based organizations in the provision of education to the people	63(26.2)	138(57.5)	35(14.6)	4(1.7)	3.08
There is no need for restructuring of the curriculum to integrate the values of girl-child	51(21.3)	79(32.9)	82(34.2)	28(11.6)	2.64
There is a need to abandon harmful socio-cultural practices	57(23.8)	89(37.1)	65(27.1)	29(12.0)	2.73
There is no need for appropriate legislation to ensure the right to inheritance by the girl-child	44(18.3)	9(037.5)	81(33.8)	25(10.4)	2.64
There is no need for legislation against early marriage	31(12.9)	61(25.4)	11246.7)	36(15)	2.44
There is a need for massive training of gender sensitive teachers	69(28.8)	133(55.4)	29(12.1)	9(3.7)	3.09
Women who have made their marks in various disciplines of academic and technological excellence be given due recognition	83(34.6)	123(51.3)	30(12.5)	4(1.7)	3.19
Traditional rulers need no sensitization on the value of girl-child's student education	44(18.4)	87(36.2)	79(32.9)	30(12.5)	2.60
There is no need for a special scheme for girl-child student education, that will consider cultural and religious	37(15.4)	70(29.2)	97(40.4)	36(15)	2.45
There should be adequate funding from both governments, NGOs and donor agencies on course of girl-child student education	80(33.3)	127(52.9)	31(13)	2(0.8)	3.19
There should be sensitization of parents about the values of educating a girl-child	93(38.8)	111(46.3)	32(13.3)	4(1.6)	3.22
Parents and communities in the rural areas should not follow the existing government laws concerning girl-child's Education	71(29.6)	128(53.3)	30(12.5)	11(4.6)	3.08
Parents should expose their girls to risk during market days.	63(26.3)	140(58.3)	27(11.3)	10(4.1)	3.07
Parents and rural communities must encourage early child marriage	48(20)	116(48.3)	65(27.1)	11(4.6)	2.84
Government should enforce laws to ensure peace and security in the rural communities	78(32.5)	117(48.8)	41(17.1)	4(1.6)	3.12

Less than 2.0= unfavourable strategy, greater than or equal to 2.0=favourable strategy (Source: Field survey, 2023).

both government, NGOs and donor agencies on the course of girl-child (\bar{x} =3.19). Brophy (2020) examined the impact of funding from NGOs and government support on girl-child education in Africa (rural areas). They found that areas receiving consistent funding from these organizations had significantly higher enrollment rates and

retention of girls in secondary school. This supports the recommendation in the discussion that adequate funding is crucial to sustaining girl-child education in rural areas.

Women who have made their marks in various disciplines of academic and technological excellence be given due recognition (\bar{x} =3.19). Dhiman (2023) highlighted

that exposure to successful women in academic and professional fields encouraged parents and girls to prioritize education. The study concluded that showcasing women who excel in various disciplines significantly motivates rural girls to pursue secondary education, in line with the strategy of giving due recognition to successful women. Families need to be empowered financially ($\bar{x}=3.18$). Abubakar (2024) analyzed the economic barriers affecting girl-child education in Nigeria and found that financially empowering families in rural communities leads to an increase in girls' school attendance. The findings strongly support the notion that the financial empowerment of families is essential for improving girl-child education, as economic hardship is a leading factor in girls dropping out of school.

The findings of this study highlight critical interventions needed to improve girl-child education in rural communities. The high mean score for enforcing laws to ensure peace and security in rural areas ($\bar{x}=3.12$) underscores the essential role of a safe learning environment in reducing dropout rates. This is consistent with recent research by Ahmed *et al.* (2023), which emphasizes that insecurity and violence in rural areas significantly hinder access to education, particularly for girls. In addition, the study's call for the massive training of gender-sensitive teachers ($\bar{x}=3.09$) aligns with Rayaprol *et al.* (2023), who argue that gender-sensitized teaching strategies are pivotal in creating inclusive classrooms that foster retention and success for female students.

Moreover, the involvement of NGOs and community-based organizations in providing education ($\bar{x}=3.08$) is in line with findings by Pereznieta *et al.* (2017), who highlighted that community-driven educational initiatives contribute significantly to improving access to education for marginalized groups. Comparatively, Independent Education Consultant and Brophy (2020) stress the transformative impact of NGO involvement in education, particularly in bridging infrastructural and resource gaps in underserved areas. This collaborative approach complements the government's efforts and addresses deep-rooted cultural and economic barriers that impede girl-child education.

Taken together, these findings reveal the different strategies necessary to address the challenges of girl-child education in rural areas. They emphasize the importance of coordinated efforts between government entities, educators, and community stakeholders, supported by evidence from recent studies that validate their effectiveness in improving educational outcomes.

The findings from the study also highlight several critical areas concerning socio-cultural practices and girl-child education. Respondents agreed on the need to abandon harmful socio-cultural practices ($\bar{x}=2.73$) and recognized the role of religious organizations in sensitization workshops and messages ($\bar{x}=2.07$). This suggests a growing awareness of the negative impact of these practices on girl-child education. Igbo and Ejue (2021) highlighted how cultural practices hinder girl-child

education and make girls vulnerable to early marriage and denial of rights. Amadi (2013) also emphasized the critical role of religious organizations in promoting girl-child education through sensitization workshops. However, there is still significant resistance to change, as evidenced by the disagreement among respondents on whether parents and communities in rural areas should follow existing government laws concerning girl-child education ($\bar{x}=3.08$). This is consistent with the studies of Agusiobo (2018), who discussed the resistance to government laws concerning girl-child education and the need for enforcement. Additionally, there is a concerning sentiment that parents should expose their girls to risks during market days ($\bar{x}=3.07$) and encourage early child marriage ($\bar{x}=2.84$). This indicates persistent socio-cultural norms that continue to hinder progress.

The need for appropriate legislation to ensure the right to inheritance by the girl-child ($\bar{x}=2.64$) and the restructuring of the curriculum to integrate values of girl-child education ($\bar{x}=2.64$) were also downplayed by respondents. Similarly, there was a lack of support for the sensitization of traditional rulers on the value of girl-child student education ($\bar{x}=2.60$). Igbo and Ejue (2021) also revealed how market days expose girls to risks and hinder their education. The same study discussed the prevalence of early child marriage and its impact on girl-child education, the need for legislation to ensure inheritance rights, and the necessity of curriculum restructuring to integrate values of girl-child education. The importance of sensitizing traditional rulers on the value of girl-child education was also emphasized in the study by Igbo and Ejue (2021).

The respondents in the study area also disagreed that schools in rural areas must send girls home early to avoid girls' disappearance ($\bar{x}=2.53$), there is no need for a special scheme for girl-child student education, that will consider cultural and religious ($\bar{x}=2.45$). There is no need for legislation against early marriage ($\bar{x}=2.44$) while there is a need for more boarding schools for girls ($\bar{x}=1.78$). Rayaprol *et al.* (2023) conducted research on gender-sensitive training for teachers and the importance of security in rural schools in India. They concluded that teachers trained in gender-sensitive approaches and improved security measures in rural areas contribute significantly to the retention of female students in secondary school. This aligns well with the findings of this study which stress the need for gender-sensitive teacher training and improved security measures.

This study, however, is not in support of Amoros (2005), who ascertained that men have remained in charge of producing goods and services, with the result that the exercise of power over the economy, government, policy-making and religion has been defined as masculine domains, while women have been relegated to the role of biologically reproducing human life and society while performing all the other domestic functions involved, mainly household chores such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of the children, the elderly, and the sick, and attending

to the needs of their husbands.

Conclusion

The findings highlight that multiple, interwoven factors influence girl-child education in rural areas, including socio-economic, cultural, and institutional influences. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that combines community engagement, economic empowerment, security, gender sensitivity, and legislative support. By implementing these strategies, rural communities can create an environment where girls are encouraged and supported in completing their education, thereby empowering them to contribute meaningfully to society and breaking cycles of poverty and inequality.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Recommendations

1. There should be well-structured counselling and sensitization programs for parents in local communities that should focus on the long-term benefits of girl-child education. Community and leaders of religion could lead these initiatives to ensure widespread participation and acceptance, helping shift cultural perspectives that may discourage educating girls.
2. Public secondary schools in rural areas should avoid sending girls home early, especially in areas with security concerns, as this increases their vulnerability. Establishing safe school environments, including potential boarding school options, could ensure that girls are protected from risks such as abduction or harassment, encouraging them to remain in school.
3. Training teachers working in rural communities to adopt gender-sensitive teaching approaches can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for female students. This training should also emphasize the unique challenges girls face, especially in rural communities, and help teachers become advocates for girl-child education.
4. There is a need for clear legislation that aids the rights of the girl-child, which includes protecting the girl-child from early marriage, inheritance rights, and other socio-cultural practices that hinder their education. Advocacy groups, NGOs, and government bodies should collaborate to enforce these policies, thereby creating a legal environment that promotes girl-child education.

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