

**CURBING GENDER INEQUALITY IN GIRL-CHILD ACCESS TO FORMAL SCHOOL  
ENROLMENT IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The paper was extracted from an institutional based research report on gender sensitive situation analysis on gender and girl-child access to education in Sokoto State. The paper assessed ways in curbing gender inequality in girl-child formal school enrolment in Sokoto State. In Nigeria, significant progress could be said to have been achieved in closing the gender gap in access to education in many parts of the country, the progress could be said to be visible only at the primary and secondary levels of education. At the tertiary educational level, a huge inequality still exists between males and females. Various policies had been enacted but some of these policies proved futile. The study provided answer on the efforts being made to improve girl-child/gender enrolment in education in Sokoto State. The study employed a mixed research methodology using quantitative and qualitative methods in generating data for the study. 1,283 Questionnaires were distributed to relevant stakeholders while 12 IDIs and KIIs were conducted with officials of the Agency for Female Education, Ministry of Education and officials of the selected schools and FGDs conducted with female adolescents. A purposive sampling procedure was adopted in the selection of respondents. Qualitative findings from the study were analyzed thematically while the quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Based on the findings, the study discovered government created a ministry for female education. The study recommended government to massively recruit female teachers to serve as source of encouragement and to reduce the inequality in the employment vacuum created.*

**Keywords: Access, Education, Enrollment, Formal School, Gender, Girl-Child, Inequality**

**Introduction**

Education to the human race is considered bedrock for human capital and social development, this nictitates the importance of education to all gender irrespective of socio-cultural milieu. It is often said that to educate a single girl child is to educate the whole world. However, most parents do not apply this principle in the Islamic north-western part of the country, and in the Hausas. Inequality rendered on the female child originates from long-standing socio-cultural gender inequality, where the male child is considered the family breadwinner, thus he had to be educated to the highest levels, while the female child is considered men's property to be possessed and dispossessed at will, so educating the girl-child is considered only benevolent to her future family.

Education for the girl child especially formal education has become a matter of concern to stakeholders in Nigeria as a result of the inequality and deprivation leveled against the girl-child due to the notion and perception that women are weak, thus leading to a low level of formal education necessary for the attainment of self-actualization. The inequality and deprivation vary from one region of the country to another and is more prevalent in northern Nigeria in general and Northwestern Nigeria in particular and is deepened and accentuated by parents as they exert

Influence on the education of their wards, especially the girl child (Mohammed and Dauda, 2022).

In Nigeria, the entrenched patriarchal social system translates into male domination and subordination of women in both private and public spheres, the result of which is construction and perpetuation of gender inequality. Women/girls are seen to be more vulnerable to poverty, cultural and societal vices. Empirical evidences show gender disparity in enrolment, retention and completion at all levels- primary, secondary, and tertiary. In 15 northern states, the disparity in favor of boys is quite high. Women education is a road to gender equality and social justice; it is a key to gender equity, justice, improved skills and technological knowledge acquisition, improved nutrition, reproductive health, and economic empowerment (Federal Ministry of Education, 2006).

Various policies had been enacted by the Nigerian government to mitigate the wild spread inequality in gender enrollment into basic schooling, Despite Nigerian government's initiatives such as Northern Education Initiative (NEI), Girl Education Project (GEP) and Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) in bridging the massive educational gap between males and females in Sokoto state it remains one of the states with high illiteracy level due to cultural and socio-economic status factors affecting female education. (Ibrahim, Khan and Ramli, 2020).

As a guiding principle towards achieving and attaining gender equality towards girl-child education in Nigeria, various policies had been enacted by different and concerned stakeholders as it relates to ensuring gender equity in educating boys and girls but certain factors served as a constraint to this policies. Several factors combined to affect the development of children and women particularly girl-child in less developed countries. Economic hardship prevents parents from giving their children the requisite childhood support for proper development. On the other hand, culture and beliefs are also at play which encourages child marriage that interferes with the educational pursuit of girl-child in school. Children, both males, and females need moral, social, and economic as well as psychological support to be fully integrated into society, especially during the early socialization process.

Sokoto State is one of the states in Northern Nigeria with poor records of human development and women and children receive the brunt of the problems. The selection of Sokoto for the situation analysis revealed factors that hinder the full realization of rights and lifetime opportunities by vulnerable groups i.e. women and children. The State's low rate of girl-child enrollment into primary school and inclusion of females into the mainstream development process of society was due to factors itemized above. Growing gender disparity in public affairs and the number of out-of-school children in the state constitute a grave threat to the development of children, particularly the girl-child. The consequences of the exclusion of girl-child from obtaining formal education led to the present multifaceted problems faced by the children and women.

Furthermore, the human development index reports Sokoto State is among the poorest State in Nigeria. This translates into poverty in the family which implies that they would not be able to cater to the daily expenses of a girl. The prevalence of poverty which has a direct and positive relationship with socioeconomic woes prevents parents from realizing their potential. The study aims to explore ways to curb gender inequality in girl-child access to formal school in Sokoto State.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Education, the world over, is considered to be one of the most important driving forces of economic and social development. According to Olabisi (2016), education at all levels promotes health, improves the quality of life, expands access to paid employment, increases productivity, and facilitates social and political participation for men and women. Education is the right of every girl everywhere and the key to transforming her life and the life of her community. Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their full potential and to play a productive and equal role in their families, their societies, their country, and their world. Moreover, women's education is a key to gender equity, justice, and poverty reduction, as well as the socio-economic development of nations (Olabisi, 2016). However, the common reality is that even though women constitute about half of the population of the world, they are not given equal access to education with men in many parts of the world.

In Nigeria, although significant progress could be said to have been achieved in closing the gender gap in access to education in many parts of the country, the progress could be said to be visible only at the primary and secondary levels of education. At the tertiary educational level, a huge inequality still exists between males and females. Several studies have documented the glaring gender inequalities that characterize access and participation in higher education (Oanda and Akudolu, 2010; Akanbi, 2012; Olabisi, 2016). Most of these studies show that female enrollments and participation in higher education are less than 40 percent of the total number of students in higher institutions.

According to Oanda and Akudolu (2010) successful international campaigns for gender equity in education and social development coupled with the adoption of gender-responsive policies at national levels have contributed to this increasing trend in enrollments. The percentage of female students accessing and participating in primary and secondary levels of education is increasing. The progress achieved in primary and secondary education is expected to influence increased access and enrollment of women in higher education. Of concern, however, is that increased access and participation of female students at the primary school level is not necessarily translating to higher enrollments at secondary and higher education levels.

Thus, Nigeria records high female enrollment and participation rates in primary and secondary education, but high attrition rates in transition to a higher level of education. For instance, data for the overall tertiary education sector for Nigeria was 41 percent by 2006, however, female students comprised 31.2 percent of the students enrolled in 23 federal universities (Oanda, and Akudolu, (2010). Furthermore, in Nigeria, access to higher education depends on a candidate's performance in the competitive examinations organized by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). Female enrollments in Nigeria universities for 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 academic sessions stood at 35 percent, 38 percent, 38 percent, 32 percent, and 36 percent respectively (Federal Ministry of Education, 2007).

The obstacle to the realization of the potentialities of girl-child and women is the longstanding belief against women in the State. Islamic religious beliefs mixed with traditions have combined to militate against the penetration of glass-ceiling in predominantly Hausa communities like Sokoto State. Effects of such erroneous beliefs have produced religious fanatics who are anti-western education in the State. Another challenge is accessing the girl-child for the situation analysis due to cultural beliefs which prohibit adult men to interact with the opposite sex without the permission of the parents, guardian, or husband of the woman. Similarly, it would be extremely difficult to debunk the notion held about early marriage and western education for women in a society known for cultural and religious dogmatism.

However, the challenges are not insurmountable, collaborative efforts through roundtable discussion with invited scholars and experts from civil society organizations could debunk the notion held by some focal persons in the communities. During the discussion, side effects of gendered discrimination and some cultural practices which stunt the growth and development of children and women would be discouraged hence an increase in the enrollment rate. Similarly, government and other donor agencies would be mobilized to provide incentives to encourage the enrollment of girl-child into formal schools. Also, the inclusion of

women in public affairs would motivate parents to encourage their female children that they have a future if they possess the requisite skills and knowledge.

Various attempts were put in place to ensure gender equality at all levels of education. However, a review of the Nigerian situation found that gender inequality in access to education is still very prevalent in Nigeria. Although several studies on gender inequality in education were carried out in Nigeria, much focus appears to be on the inequality in access to basic and secondary education only. Thus, there is not much attention by scholars on inequalities at all levels of education. Furthermore, the few studies that focused on gender inequality in education in Nigeria, most of them were conducted in southern Nigeria, thus, little focus was given to the northern parts of the country. Given this, therefore, this study intends to study the pattern of gender inequality in educational enrollment, with specific reference to girl-child access education in Sokoto State. The study thus aims to reveal some important and silent issues on gender inequality in educational enrollment which were yet to be fully explored and articulated in northern Nigeria in general and Sokoto State in particular. The paper seeks to provide answer to the question on what are the ways through which gender equality in enrolment in education can be achieved in Sokoto state. The broad aim of this research is to examine gender disparity in high educational enrollment in some selected higher educational institutions in Sokoto State. The specific objective of the study is to suggest ways through which female gender enrolment in education can be improved.

### **Literature Review**

There is a natural gender role distinction all over the world, a reality that has created a gap in opportunities between men and women. The gap in those opportunities between men and women is what constituted what is generally regarded as gender inequality. The gender gap, is, thus the unfulfilled space between the male and female in various endeavors, including education. In the world, there is an almost equal number of males and females, however, there are no equal opportunities for the two genders in many developmental affairs in the world, with women, in most cases being marginalized. Master web Daily Newspaper (2002) reports that:

Women are more than fifty percent of the world's population. They perform two-thirds of the world's work, yet receive one-tenth of the world's income and own one-hundredth of the world's property. They represent a staggering seventy percent of the world's one billion poorest people.

Another area, in which gender inequality became more severe and which has severe consequences for societies is the gender inequality in access to education. Education is an instrument for national development and an asset to any nation. It is a vehicle for developing skills and competencies and imparting knowledge and learning. Without education, various socio-economic activities in the societies will remain stagnant and the human society will continue to wallow in ignorance. According to Otiye-Igbuzor, (2006), the relationship between education and development is well established such that education is a key index of development. It has been documented that schooling improves productivity, and health and reduces negative features of life such as child labor as well as bringing about empowerment (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002). This is why there has been a lot of emphasis on all citizens of the world having access to education, leading to further recognition of education as one of the basic human rights in 1948, following the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Since then, many other international instruments and human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981), among others have reaffirmed the right to education and have supported entitlement to education for all children (Ugwulebo, 2011; Akudolu and Eyiuche, 2015). However, it has been documented that there are high levels of high educational deprivation for both children and adults across the globe (Subrahmanian, 2002), but more serious in developing countries (UNICEF, 2007). This lack of access to education is more intense in the female gender, thus, leading to a very wide inequality in educational access between the male and the female gender. According to UNICEF (2007), the

global figure for children without education is estimated at 121 million and out of this figure 65 million were girls. Over 80 percent of these girls live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, the World Bank report of 2011 states that almost half of the world's elementary school-aged girls that are not in school live in Sub-Saharan Africa; around a quarter lives in South Asia (World Bank, 2011). Lack of access to secondary school and tertiary education is also high across the globe but also more severe in developing countries of the world (UNESCO, 2011).

Dating back as far as 2006, the National Policy on Gender in Basic Education unraveled that In Nigeria overall, girls have lower enrolment rates than boys in the formal basic education system. This scenario is much more serious in the Northern states. On the other hand, some girls enroll in a wide network of non-formal Islamic education centers in urban and rural settings, where girls' enrolments are sometimes relatively higher than those boys', (e.g. Islamiya schools in Kano, Borno and Sokoto). This is why the policy recommended that the Non-Formal Sector must be further encouraged as an alternative delivery mode to obtain quality Education For All (EFA) by 2015 and gender equality as soon as possible. Even though this policy meant to ensure that by 2015, the EFA policy is effectively and efficiently achieved especially in the most entrenched states of Borno, Kano and Sokoto, Sokoto state still remains among top priority states where gender inequality vested on the girl-child in terms of basic education and post secondary education is still prevalent.

Factors identified as being responsible for gender inequality in access to education are varied. According to Makuro (2014), such factors include endemic poverty, schooling cost, the burden of household labor, shortage of school facilities, negative and even dangerous school environment, and cultural and social practices that discriminate against girls including early marriage and restriction on female mobility and limited employment opportunities for women.

For more than a decade ago, the aforementioned factors were captured the Federal Ministry of Education in the 2006 National Policy on Gender in Basic Education, and were considered hindering factors to equitable access to basic education by gender, notable among these factors include; girl-unfriendly school infrastructure, skewed female-male teacher ratios, gender biased attitudes against girls, sexual harassment of girls, poverty, cultural factors and erroneous interpretation of religious teaching.

As a strategy towards increasing girls' enrolment in schools, government recommended advocacy and sensitization campaigns using traditional leaders and advocates to parents, free and compulsory basic education for all children regardless of gender, Child Friendly School Principles especially providing child friendly school infrastructure and separate conveniences for boys and girls, Integration and Mainstreaming where western education is integrated into non-formal Islamic education centers, Training and Supply of Female Teachers in Rural School to boost female enrollment and Incentives for Girls especially to female teachers in order to encourage their deployment into rural schools. For more a decade and half of adopting this policy as strategy towards achieving equitable access to gender basic education in Nigeria, especially targeted towards peril states of Borno, Kano and Sokoto, it could be visibly said that some of the policies suffers a massive set-back especially as it relates to gross failure in infrastructure provision as students had to study in dilapidated classrooms with minimal or no adequate chair provision, traditional rulers especially district heads were reluctant to enforce gender equity in basic education where erring parents are adequately disciplined and sanctioned, non-provision of conveniences and sanitary equipment to girls, as well limited supply of female teachers to rural schools which is resulting from absence of incentives to serve as encouragement to the female teachers.

Various attempts, both at global and national levels were made over the years to deal with the gender discrimination against females in access to education. Olabisi (2016) listed those global efforts to include, among others, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, World Conferences on Women, the 1979 UN General Assembly landmark Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), UNIFEM (now called UN Women) the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, MDG3 The Beijing Platform of Action (BPoA) and the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Swedish

International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Dubai 2013 British Council's Going Global Conference. Others include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the 1990 World Conference on Education For All (EFA), in Jomtien, Thailand, and more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Sokoto State, various attempts were also made to ensure access to education for all in the state. For instance, there is a free feeding program at both primary and secondary schools in the state. The government has also come up with a scholarship program for the indigenes of the state that are in tertiary institutions. More recently, the government has introduced a program for the payment of tuition and registration fees for the indigenes in the state that are in various tertiary institutions within and outside Nigeria. The government has also established the Agency for Female Education. All these attempts were made to ensure that access to education has been given to all citizens and gender disparity at all levels of education are eliminated.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), even though the target of the MDGs of eliminating inequality at primary and secondary levels by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 could not be said to have been met an increased gender parity in education at the primary and secondary levels was witnessed, with more girls enrolling and completing their education. Consequently, there has been progressive improvement in the literacy level of women with their net enrollment rate in primary and secondary education for the first time reaching 59.8% and 45.9% respectively (NBS, 2007). Onwuameze, (2013) also reported that following the introduction of educational policies and programs in Nigeria, impressive growth in enrollment at the primary and secondary levels has been witnessed, with an enrollment of pupils in primary education in Nigeria increasing from 3,515,827 in 1970 to 14,383,487 in 1985 and 20,080,986 in 2010.

However, this impressive gain witnessed at the primary and secondary level was not witnessed at the higher educational level, especially in respect of the female gender. At the higher educational level in Nigeria, there is still wide gender inequality, with females being dominated (Adeyemi and Akpotu, 2004; Adeyeye, 2014). Statistics from the National University Commission (NUC), have indicated that female enrollment in undergraduate programs in Nigerian Universities has never reached 40% (Tinke, 2011). Meanwhile, higher education is very important for the development of any nation, and thus, denying women access to higher education can hinder the overall development of Nigeria.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Noting the place of first-hand information in ascertaining the degree of relationships between variables and coupled with the nature of the problem studied, the research design adopted for the study was a household survey in the selected Local Government Areas of Sokoto State from December 2019- June 2020. This involved information generated from a portion of the population that served as a representative of the entire population. In addition, it involved methodological triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative alternatives. This is to provide a more holistic perspective in respect of the variables studied.

The data were collected from as wide a variety of levels as possible. Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) were carried out with officials of the Agency for Women Education, the Ministry of Education, and officials of the selected schools. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with traditional and religious leaders in the area. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) sessions were held with female adolescents from the selected local government areas. This was to verify claims made by the officials on the issue under study. Also, questionnaires were administered to the sampled respondents in the study area.

Both qualitative and quantitative surveys were carried out in a representative sampling of the study area and data was elicited with regards to the socio-economic situation in the study area; girl-child enrolment situations in western education and perception of people about girl-child education in the study area. In addition, additional information was sought from heads of schools and other stakeholders of the communities selected for the study. Meetings with various associations such as the Religious organizations, Women Economic Empowerment Organization, and other interested parties were organized in January 2020 to wrap

up the research. The study also disseminated a preliminary report of the research findings to all the stakeholders. In sum, some Key Informant Interviews and In-Depth Interviews were conducted during the survey to complement the quantitative data.

### Population of the study

The study targets all the 23 local government areas of Sokoto state. The National Population Commission (2006) puts the population of Sokoto state at 3,702,676. However, using the Geometric growth rate approach at a 3% annual growth rate, the projected population of Sokoto state as of 2019 is 5,524, 100. The target population includes parents, school teachers, government officials, and traditional and religious leaders.

### Sample Size

Going by the projected population of the study area, it was difficult for the entire population to be subject to the study. Therefore, the sample size of the study was 1,379. With a population of 5,524,100 sizes, a margin error of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and the assumption that the response distribution of each question is 50%, the recommended sample size of the survey based on the total population of the selected village areas were 1, 379 using the sample size calculator published in 2004 by Raosoft Inc. The sample size of each village area was determined by its population percentage. A total of six local government areas were selected from the state.

**Table 1: Distribution of questionnaires**

S/N	Local Government Area	Number of Wards	Number of Questionnaires
1.	Sokoto North	12	216
2.	Binji	11	213
3.	Gwadabawa	12	214
4	Gudu	12	214
5	Tureta	11	213
6	Bodinga	12	214
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>1,283</b>

In all, a total number of 1,379 respondents were sampled to represent the study population where questionnaires were administered to a total number of 1,283 across the six selected local government areas of the state.

**Table 2: Distribution of Respondents for KIIs and IDIs**

Category of Respondents	Proposed Key informant interviews and In-Depth Interviews with religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, and heads of schools		Proposed Focus Group Discussion with Female Adolescents	
	Number of Respondents	Number of Interviews	Local Government Areas	Number of Participants
Religious Leaders	3	3	Sokoto North	12
Traditional Leaders	3	3	Binji	12
Officials of Min. of Education	3	3	Gwadabawa	12
Officials of Agency for Women Education	3	3	Gudu	12
Heads of Schools/Teachers	12	12	Tureta	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>24</b>	Bodinga	<b>12</b>
			<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>

To elicit complementary detailed information i.e. KIIs and IDIs in each local government area were held for four different categories of people namely: religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, and Heads of schools/teachers. While FGDs were conducted with female groups and the size of the group was 6 to 12 participants in each session. The size enhanced effective participation by all members of the group. The responses to issues raised were tape-recorded and thereafter professionally transcribed and qualitatively analyzed. Similarly, the data was integrated into the main quantitative data.

The target population for the administration of the questionnaires was both adult and youth members of the community. The questionnaires were personally administered by the members of the research team.

### **Sampling Techniques and Procedures**

The cluster sampling technique was employed in the selection of the sample. The state was first divided into three (3) clusters from which two (2) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly sampled, making a total of six (6) LGAs. The LGAs were further divided into clusters according to their number of Wards from which three (3) wards were randomly selected. Subsequently, individual respondents whose questionnaire was administered were randomly selected through their residences or households. For qualitative data collection, on arrival at each selected setting, the principal researcher introduced the team to the traditional ruler who then assembled the required number and categories of respondents for interviews (KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs). This was made possible because a letter of introduction was sent to all village and District Heads ahead of the visit in advance. This technique was adopted in response to the residential pattern of the villages (scattered), rules and regulations for gaining entrance, and the respect that traditional rulers command in such homogeneous societies.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

As said earlier, the questionnaire was the main instrument of data collection, which was administered personally by the research team as well as conducting Key Informant Interviews (KII), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

### **Instruments of Data Collection**

A well-structured questionnaire was administered as the main instrument of data collection containing relevant questions on the study variables. The questions were open and close-ended with fixed alternatives for the close-ended questions and open-ended questions which allowed the respondents to freely express their views. Before the administration of the questionnaires, the District Heads of the selected areas were informed and the purpose of the study was duly explained to them. Apart from the questionnaire, which was the main instrument of data collection, interviews and focus group interview guides were designed to elicit complementary information.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

The triangulation method was employed in the analysis of the data obtained. The quantitative data were subjected to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) computer software. Univariate and multivariate analyses were used in the analysis. The univariate analysis summarized the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the respondents into percentages, whereas the multivariate analysis examined the cross-tabulation of variables to ascertain relationships between them. Tables and charts were used for pictorial representation of the data. On the other hand, the qualitative data were subjected to qualitative analysis through content analysis which brought out the thematic views of the participants through verbatim quotations. Triangulation was used in the analysis of data obtained where both the qualitative and quantitative data were integrated.

## **DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION**

Below is the analysis and interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative data and a discussion of the major findings that follow forthwith. However, a total of 1,283 questionnaires was administered to the sampled respondents but researchers were able to retrieve and analyzed a total of 1,119 as the remaining questionnaires could not be retrieved and some were poorly responded to, which made it impossible for the responses to be analysed. Therefore, the data interpretation and analysis were based on the retrieved and appropriately responded questionnaires.

**Table 3: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents I**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Male	243	21.7



<b>Sex Distribution of Respondents</b>	Female	876	78.3
	<b>Total</b>	1119	<b>100.0</b>
Age Distribution of Respondents	<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	10-20 Years	354	31.6
	21-30 Years	696	62.2
	31-40 Years	54	4.8
	41-50 Years	12	1.1
	Above 50 Years	3	.3
	<b>Total</b>	1119	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Respondent's Religion Affiliation</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Islam	1062	94.9
	Christianity	54	4.8
	Traditional Religion	3	.3
	<b>Total</b>	1119	<b>100.0</b>
Respondent's Education Qualification	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Qur'anic	54	4.8
	Primary	45	4.0
	Secondary	408	36.5
	Tertiary	609	54.4
	Others (Specify)...	3	.3
	<b>Total</b>	1119	<b>100.0</b>

On the sex distribution of the respondents, most of the respondents (78.3 percent) were females. This is unconnected to the study in view as the female population is vulnerable to gender inequality in terms of access to education and had prior knowledge of why inequality persists in terms of access to education and will provide a factual response to the menace.

The majority of the respondents (62.2 percent) are between the ages of 21 and 30 Years. This segment of the population falls within the youthful population and is classified to be the age at which the female child is expected to complete all levels of schooling (primary to tertiary level). Sampling such a category of the youthful population guaranteed evidenced-based findings which might correlate with lived experiences.

On the religious affiliation of the respondents, Islam happens to be the dominant religion in the study area with most of the respondents (94.9 percent) being adherent to the Islamic faith. This is unconnected to the fact that Sokoto State happens to be the seat and cradle of Islamic religion, as most of the respondents are descendants of Uthman bin Fodiyo who spearheaded the 1804 Jihad that mounted Sokoto the cradle of Islam in Nigeria.

More than half of the respondents (54.4 percent) had a post-secondary qualification. This is a clear indication that tertiary education is taken with utmost importance among individuals in Sokoto State, especially with the availability of different tertiary institutions of learning in the State capital. This means most parents were willing to send their wards to a higher institution of learning due to availability and accessibility.

**Table 4: Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents II**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Marital Status of the Respondents</b>	Single/Never Married	516	46.1
	Married	567	50.7
	Divorced	15	1.3
	Separated	18	1.6
	Widow(er)	3	.3
	<b>Total</b>		1119
<b>Respondents' Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Hausa	822	73.5
	Fulani	261	23.3
	Yoruba	30	2.7
	Igbo	3	.3
	Others	3	.3
	<b>Total</b>		1119
<b>Respondents' Occupation</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Student	57	5.1
	Civil Servant	174	15.5
	Business	453	40.5
	Farmers	390	34.9
	Artisan	45	4.0
	<b>Total</b>		1119
<b>Income Level of Respondents</b>	<b>Income</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	10,000-20999	117	10.5
	21,000-30,999	153	13.7
	31,000-40,999	486	43.4
	41,000-50,999	285	25.5
	51,000-Above	78	7.0
	<b>Total</b>		1119

Half of the respondents (50.7 percent) were married while almost half of the respondents (46.1 percent) were single or never married. This implies that most of the respondents either got married while still schooling or got married having completed their post-secondary education. The implication of such is that girls usually got married between the age of 20- to 30 years in Sokoto State and are usually compelled to present to suitors once they attain such age even while still schooling.

Most of the respondents (73.5 percent) belong to Hausa ethnic group and this is due to the nature of Sokoto State being a major Hausa ethnic affiliation. This implication of such is that most of the respondents will be likely influenced by Hausa's socio-cultural values of preference for male child dominance over the females. Almost half of the respondents (40.5 percent) engaged in different businesses as a source of livelihood. This is a clear indication that despite having post-secondary qualifications, most individuals in the state hardly rely on a white-collar job for survival.

Almost half of the respondents (43.4 percent) earn between 31,000-40,999 naira monthly. This signifies that most individuals in Sokoto State earn more than the minimum wage in their legitimate businesses monthly.

**Table 12: Improvement of female gender enrolment in Sokoto State**

Security Situation in the State Preventing Girls' Participation in Higher Education	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Yes	915	81.8
	No	204	18.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1119</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education Responding to Girls' Specific Needs</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Adoption of Morning and Afternoon School Hours	294	26.3
	Establishment of Women Centre for Continuous Education	627	56.0
	Establishment of Skill Acquisition Centres	9	.8
	All of the Above	189	16.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1119</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	Schools as Safe Spaces and Guaranteeing Protection for Girls	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Yes		681	60.9
No		438	39.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>1119</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>If No, which of these Factors is Responsible</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Bullying is Prevalent in the School	3	.3
	Gender Stereotypes are Still Common in Schools	345	30.8
	The Practice of Corporal Punishment	66	5.9
	Absence of Security Fences around the School	24	2.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Responses on Policies or Laws Adopted to Eliminate Gender Inequality in Access to Education in the State	<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	Yes	612	54.7
	No	507	45.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1119</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Most of the respondents (81.8 percent) agreed that the current security situation in the state prevents girls' participation in higher education. This is simply because most girls would want to prevent themselves from being kidnapped and forcefully married to a bandit. This implies that as insecurity worsens, female enrolment into secondary and higher institutions worsens in the state.

In integrating the above findings with the qualitative data, the study discovered an improvement in security monitoring by security agencies to prevent the massive kidnapping of female students. In addition to the above, female students are well protected against gender-based violence and other social vices.

More than half of the respondents (56.0 percent) are of the view that to improve female gender participation in western schooling, there is a need for the establishment of a women's center for continuous education. The implication of establishing such a center is that it will grant women who got married while schooling the opportunity to continue their education up to the tertiary level.

Findings from the qualitative data authenticate the idea of the establishment of a women's center for continuing education where the Sokoto State government established a Ministry for female education and also created a department of female education in the ministry of basic and primary education to improve

access to education to females and women. To buttress further, a participant commended the unabated effort of government in addressing some of the related challenges to women, the participant revealed that:

I know about a program sponsored by the state government called Girls for Health (G for Health). I participated in it. It is a program designed to teach and recruit girls mostly from rural areas that are less or backward in health-related issues. After the training, the girls would be posted to their respected localities/communities to deliver health services to the rural populace” (FGD Rural Area).

From the above findings, it is discernible that state intervention by governmental and non-governmental agencies would help boost the participation of women in higher education in the state.

The majority of the respondents (60.9 percent) agreed that schools are guaranteed to be safe spaces for girls and provide girls with protection from violence and abuse in their respective communities. The implication of such continuous protection for girls in school will encourage other girls and parents who conceive schools to be breeding ground for violence and abuse to dispel such assertion and allow enrolment of girls into formal schooling.

More than a quarter of the respondents (30.8 percent) expresses a divergent view and alleged that Gender Stereotypes are the major reason behind the under-enrollment in western schooling. This signifies that stereotypes are usually tendered on girls who have attained the age for marriage as stipulated by society and are still in school without getting married.

More than half of the respondents (54.7 percent) are aware of the initiatives being adopted –in terms of policies/laws – to eliminate gender inequality in access to education. This signifies the policies/laws are not effectively being enforced as most parents hardly abide, if such policies are to be enforced, it will greatly improve the accessibility of all categories of learning to the girl-child.

In affirming the above findings, stakeholders lamented government and some philanthropic stakeholders usually takes with utmost priority girl-child education to ensure a leveling ground is provided to both male and females. The study discovered free education initiatives by the state government from primary to tertiary level, students at the tertiary level are usually refunded their tuition fees to encourage all the students. Furthermore, philanthropic individuals usually sponsor intelligent girls in tertiary institutions. A traditional ruler lamented that:

I can't forget the act of a former Commissioner in the state but he is currently a member of the Sokoto State House of Assembly, he used to sponsor at least 10 girls yearly after finishing secondary school to tertiary level in different aspects of learning be it Nursing, Degree; Midwifery, etc. Currently, the last badge he sponsored is almost done with their program (Male Religious Ruler, Rural Area).

To minimize gender inequality in terms of educational enrollment into western schooling specifically higher institutions of learning, findings from the study recommended continuous sensitization on the benefit of western schooling in the rural areas. Stakeholders further recommended huge financial support to women who complete tertiary education while getting married. To further serve as a morale booster, findings from the study recommended automatic employment to women who vehemently excel in tertiary institutions. This will serve as a source of encouragement to parents to send the female ward to western schooling. A female head teacher unraveled that:

It is recommended by another respondent that Government should give free education to girls at all levels. Not only that, the Stakeholders should at least make a policy that every girl that goes to the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions will get huge financial support while getting married (Female Head Teacher, Rural Area).

In a related development, participants recommended the provision of stationeries like books as well as uniforms to the less privileged since the free education scheme does not cover books and stationeries. Participants further recommended the provision of necessary facilities, equipment, and a knowledgeable teaching workforce to serve as a source of motivation and social protection for parents. This corroborates the statement of a religious leader below:

For the government to make education accessible, especially to females there is a need to provide qualified teachers with zeal and passion at every stage of school. Be it primary level up to tertiary institutions. In addition, there is the need for State-of-the-art infrastructures as well as financial assistance to parents particularly income earners to support their girl-child education” (Male Religious Leader, Urban Area).

In conclusion, if all recommendations are critically assessed and analyzed, there will be an utmost increase in the level of enrollment into secondary and post-secondary education.

### **Discussion of the Major Findings**

The study was based on a gender-sensitive situation analysis of girl-child access to education in Sokoto State. To achieve the objectives of the study, Questionnaires, KIIs, FGDs, and IDIs sessions were held with different stakeholders. Below is the discussion of the major findings in line with the objectives of the study. On the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, findings from the study discovered a strong relationship between sex, age, religion, and parents’ level of income. The aforementioned variables strongly serve as a link to gender preference and access to girl-child education in Sokoto State. A major discovery by the study was that proactive measures had been taken by the government to improve educational enrollment across both gender, such initiatives include free education programs running through primary and secondary schools and scholarship programs for students in tertiary education. To further support the quest for female participation in western schooling, the state government created a ministry and a department specifically to oversee and promote female participation in western education from primary to tertiary level. This corroborates the findings of the Annual School Census, (2018/2019) where it was unraveled that the Sokoto State government initiated a free school feeding program at both primary and secondary schools, scholarship programs for the indigenes of the state that are in tertiary institutions, payment of tuition and registration fees for the indigenes in the state that are in various tertiary institutions within and outside Nigeria and establishment of the Agency for Female Education. It was further supported by Onwuameze, (2013) where it was reported that following the introduction of educational policies and programs in Nigeria, impressive growth in enrollment at the primary and secondary levels has been witnessed.

It was discovered that most LGAs especially schools in the rural villages are confronted with an acute supply of female teachers, youth female corps members were the only teachers found in these areas thus discouraging parents in these villages from enrolling the female child into western schooling. This corresponds to the 2006 National Policy on Gender in Basic Education which recommends providing child friendly school infrastructure and separate conveniences for boys and girls, Integration and Mainstreaming where western education is integrated into non-formal Islamic education centers, Training and Supply of Female Teachers in Rural School to boost female enrollment and Incentives for Girls especially to female teachers in order to encourage their deployment into rural schools

Drawing from the above, the study further discovered that the availability of female teachers positively impacts female participation in higher education as female teachers give girls more confidence to participate in higher institutions of learning. This is indicated by the findings of the Annual School Census, (2018/2019) on the notion that enrolment rates for girls in Sokoto state are still low due to the inadequacy or absence of qualified female teachers to serve as role models to motivate girls to stay in school.

Insecurity was also considered to be a major factor affecting female enrolment in western schooling; this is due to the notorious activities of bandits and other kingpins in kidnapping and marrying off females to their counterparts. This is in line with the findings of According to Makuro (2014) where certain factors were identified to affect the schooling of the girl-child, these factors include endemic poverty, schooling cost, the

burden of household labor, shortage of school facilities, negative and even dangerous school environment, and cultural and social practices that discriminate against girls including early marriage and restriction on female mobility and limited employment opportunities for women.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study provide a situation analysis of Gender and girl-child access to education in Sokoto State with specific emphasis on the ways in curbing gender inequality in girl-child enrollment into formal schooling. The analysis was based on a quantitative and qualitative survey implemented across six LGAs of Sokoto State. Based on the situation analysis, the study found that the state government had been taking proactive measures in improving girl-child education notably the establishment of a ministry and an agency responsible for women education in the state. It is in the concluding remarks that the study recommended massive recruitment of female teachers into public schools in the state to minimize the employment vacuum.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study from the situation analysis, the study proffered the under-listed recommendations:

1. There is a need for huge financial support to women who complete tertiary education while getting married; this will encourage more women to substitute early marriage for the completion of tertiary education due to the huge financial benefit during the marriage.
2. Philanthropic individuals, concerned organizations, and conscious stakeholders should take with utmost priority girl-child education to ensure a levelling ground is provided to both males and females, this can be achieved when these stakeholders favour female education and provide scholarships and sponsorship to females who excel academically at the end of primary, junior secondary and senior secondary schools, this will encourage recalcitrant parents to be influenced by the financial benefits the girl-child will attract to the family.
3. Automatic employment should be guaranteed to females who vehemently excel in tertiary institutions, especially in health-related disciplines; this will serve as a source of encouragement to other parents to encourage their female child to be a health expert someday to help the entire community.
4. Sokoto State Government through the Ministry of women affairs and the newly established ministry for female education should make it a habitual practice to sponsor at least two or three females from each ward who completed secondary education in tertiary institutions, this will give other parents the assurance, zeal and the belief that someday their daughters will be sponsored.
5. There is a need for government to massively recruit female teachers and post at least two or three female teachers to various primary and secondary schools in the state, this will minimize the employment vacuum of females to males and the proclamation of employment being reserved for only children of the elite.
6. There is a need for posting security personnel armed with weapons to various secondary schools located in the outskirts and rural areas of Sokoto especially female schools, this will give the parents and the girl-child assured security in schools, and will further minimize the fear of being kidnapped which promotes preference for early marriage over forceful marriage to bandits.
7. The ministry and agency responsible for the demands of women should always carryout tour to different schools in the state especially female schools and schools located in the rural areas of the state to identify academically excelled students and grant government automatic scholarship and sponsorship in higher institutions within and across the country, this will change the mindset of recalcitrant parents.
8. The ministry and agency responsible for the demands of women should always conduct sensitization campaigns in villages and rural areas and carry along learning equipments to be distributed to the girl-child mostly to attract the attention of the parents and the girl-child towards western schooling.

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