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Gender Disparities in Educational Participation and Academic Achievement Among Students in Abeokuta Metropolis

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Abstract
This study examined gender disparities in educational participation and academic achievement among secondary school students in Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State, Nigeria. Despite increased access to education, unequal experiences and outcomes persist between male and female students. Guided by Social Role Theory and Gender Schema Theory, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore how socio-cultural expectations, economic factors, and institutional practices influence students' educational engagement and performance. Data were collected from 200 students, as well as teachers, administrators, and parents, using structured copies of questionnaire, standardized achievement tests, and semi structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. Findings revealed that both male and female students exhibit high levels of educational participation; however, differences exist in patterns of engagement. Female students demonstrate greater consistency in attendance, attentiveness, and assignment completion, whereas male students show relatively higher involvement in extracurricular activities. In terms of academic achievement, male students perform better in Mathematics and Basic Science, while female students excel in English Language, although these differences are moderate. The study further identified socio- cultural norms, domestic responsibilities, economic pressures, and subtle institutional biases as key determinants of these disparities. It concludes that gender differences in education are structurally driven rather than based on innate ability. The study recommends the adoption of gender-responsive teaching strategies, increased parental awareness, and strengthened policy implementation to promote equitable educational outcomes.

Keywords: Gender Disparities, Educational Participation, Academic Achievement, Socio-cultural Factors, Gender Equity

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of individual and societal development. However, despite global efforts to promote equal access to education, disparities persist, particularly along gender lines. In many developing countries, gender inequalities continue to shape students' educational participation and academic achievement. These disparities are evident not only in enrolment and retention but also in classroom engagement, subject preferences, and learning outcomes. In Nigeria, the education system reflects broader socio-cultural and economic structures that often reinforce unequal experiences for male and female students (UNESCO, 2019). Girls frequently encounter barriers such as domestic responsibilities, cultural expectations, and limited encouragement in certain academic fields (UNICEF, 2018). Conversely, boys are increasingly affected by economic pressures, peer influence, and disengagement from some areas of academic study, particularly language-based subject (OECD, 2022).

Thus, the concept of gender is examined beyond its biological connotation to reflect its social construction, shaped by cultural norms, values, and expectations that influence individuals' roles and opportunities in society (UNESCO, 2019). Within the educational context, these socially constructed roles often determine access, participation, and academic outcomes for male and female students, thereby contributing to persistent inequalities (World Bank, 2020). The study explored the concept of educational participation, which encompasses enrolment, attendance, classroom engagement, and progression through various levels of schooling (Oketch & Rolleston, 2016). Further studies elsewhere have shown that participation is influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors, including household responsibilities, poverty, and gender-based expectations, which may disproportionately affect either boys or girls depending on the context (UNESCO, 2015; Eze, 2019). Closely related to this is academic achievement, commonly measured through students' performance in examinations and assessments. Evidence suggests that observed

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differences in achievement between male and female students are largely shaped by environmental and institutional factors such as teacher expectations, curriculum design, and learning environments rather than innate ability (OECD, 2020; Eurydice, 2019). Consequently, this study was anchored on relevant theoretical frameworks such as Social Role Theory which posits that gender differences arise from culturally defined roles assigned to males and females, which influence their behaviour, aspirations and educational choices (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Complementing this perspective, Gender Schema Theory which explains how individuals internalize societal beliefs about gender and use the cognitive structures to interpret experiences and guide behaviour (Bem, 1981; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). These theories collectively highlight the interplay between external social expectations and internal cognitive processes in shaping students' participation and achievement in education.

Urban centres such as Abeokuta Metropolis provide a unique setting for examining these disparities. As a rapidly developing city in Nigeria, Abeokuta represents a convergence of traditional cultural values and modern educational opportunities. Although access to schooling is generally higher in urban areas, gender-based differences persist in patterns of participation, academic engagement, and subject specialization, shaped by both household dynamics and institutional practices (Oketch, Mutisya, & Ngware, 2019; Mugisha & Rujumba, 2023). Against this backdrop, this study investigates the nature and determinants of gender disparities in educational participation and academic achievement among students in Abeokuta Metropolis. By exploring the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that influence these disparities, the study was to provide context-specific insights that can inform policies and interventions geared toward achieving gender equity in education.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine gender disparities in educational participation and academic achievement among students in Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of data on existing conditions without manipulating any variables. It also allows for both quantitative and qualitative insights into students' educational experiences. The study was conducted in Abeokuta Metropolis, an urban centre in Ogun State characterised by a mix of traditional cultural values and modern educational structures. The target population comprised students in public and private junior secondary schools within the metropolis. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness. First, schools were stratified into public and private categories. From each category, ten (10) schools were randomly selected. A total of 200 students were then selected using stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of both male and female students at the Junior Secondary School (JSS 3) level.

2.1 Instruments for Data Collection

Data were collected using three main instruments:

i. **Structured Questionnaire:** Designed for students and teachers, consisting of both closed-ended items (to generate quantitative data) and open-ended questions (to capture perceptions on gender roles and educational experiences).

ii. **Achievement Tests:** Standardised tests (State Basic Examination Questions) in Mathematics, English Language, and Basic Science were administered to assess students' academic performance objectively.

2.2 Method of Data Analysis

The instruments were subjected to three-expert validation to ensure content and construct validity. A pilot study was conducted in schools outside the study area to refine the instruments. Reliability was established using the test–retest method, and a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.78 was obtained, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data collection was carried out in two phases. Questionnaires were administered to students during school hours with the assistance of trained research assistants. Achievement tests were conducted under controlled conditions and scored using a standard marking scheme. Collated data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores. The mean score cut-off for positive responses was set at 2.50 while t-test was used to measure the significance of students' performances in the achievement tests.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

This section presents the findings from the analysis of data collected through questionnaires and achievement tests. The results were organised into demographic characteristics, educational participation, academic engagement, and factors influencing gender disparities. Tables were also used to summarise key findings from the questionnaire items followed by concise interpretations.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	98	49.0
Female	102	51.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 1 shows a balanced representation of male (49%) and female (51%) students. This balance enhances the reliability of gender-based comparisons and ensures that the findings are not skewed toward any particular group.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group (Years)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Below 12	28	14.0
12 – 14	72	36.0
15 – 17	80	40.0
18 and above	20	10.0
Total	**200**	**100.0**

In Table 2, most respondents (70%) fall within the 12–17 age group, which is typical for junior secondary school students. This indicates that the data reflects the experiences of students within the appropriate academic age range.

Table 3: Type of School Attended

School Type	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Public	118	59.0
Private	82	41.0
Total	**200**	**100**

As shown in Table 3, a higher proportion of respondents were drawn from public schools (59%), reflecting the dominant role of public education in the study area. Including both school types allows for broader insight into educational experiences.

3.2 Educational Participation

Table 4: Educational Participation of Students

Item	Gender	SA	A	D	SD	%SA+A	Remark
Regular attendance	Male	45	38	10	5	84.69	Higher
	Female	47	38	12	5	83.33	Lower
Classroom participation	Male	42	39	12	5	82.65	Higher
	Female	43	39	15	5	80.39	Lower
Punctuality	Male	34	40	16	8	75.51	Lower
	Female	36	42	16	8	76.47	Higher
Extracurricular activities	Male	46	35	12	5	82.65	Lower
	Female	50	36	11	5	84.31	Higher

As can be seen in Table 4, male students were perceived to have higher regular attendance, classroom participation and extra-curricular activities than their female counterparts in the sampled schools; while female students were more punctual in class activities.

3.3 Academic Engagement and Learning Behaviour

In Table 5, female students were perceived to demonstrate higher level of assignment completion, class attention and enjoyment of English lessons than their male counterparts; while the male students were observed to have higher confidence in solving mathematical problems.

Table 5: Academic Engagement

Statement	Gender	SA	A	D	SD	%SA+A	Remark
Assignment completion	Male	42	36	13	7	79.59	Lower
	Female	46	38	13	5	82.35	Higher
Attention in class	Male	45	34	11	8	80.61	Lower
	Female	50	35	13	4	83.33	Higher
Confidence in Mathematics	Male	34	36	20	8	71.42	Higher
	Female	28	34	26	14	60.78	Lower
Enjoyment of English	Male	46	32	14	6	79.59	Lower
	Female	55	36	7	4	89.22	Higher

3.4 Perceived Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Gender Disparities

Table 6: Mean Ranking of Socio-Cultural Influences

Statement	Mean Ranking	Remark
Domestic duties affect schooling	3.18	Highest
Cultural beliefs influence subject choice	3.15	Higher
Gender expectations affect confidence	3.12	High

From Table 6, all the students perceived domestic duties as the highest factor influencing gender disparities in school academic performances, followed by cultural beliefs and next is the gender expectations of the students.

3.5 Institutional Factors

Table 7: Mean Ranking of Gender-Based School-Related Factors

Statement	Mean Ranking	Remark
Unequal encouragement by teachers	2.96	High
Subjects seen as gender-specific	3.20	Highest
Low School support for gender equity	3.02	Higher

As can be seen from Table 7, perceived gender-specific subjects was observed by the students to be the highest cause of gender disparity in academic achievements, followed by low school support for gender equity and then unequal encouragement by the teachers.

3.6 Bridging the gap of Gender Disparity

Table 8: Mean Ranking for bridging the gap of gender disparity

Statement	Mean Ranking	Remark
Equal education opportunities for all	3.40	Highest
Balance Gender Treatment	3.05	High
Less Parental influence on subject choice	3.27	Higher

From Table 8, most respondents support equal education for both genders as the highest means of

bridging educational gaps, followed by less parental influence on subject choice and then balancing the treatment of both gender in schools and at homes.

3. 7 Achievement Tests' Results

Table 9: Gender-Based Performance

Subject	Male Mean	Female Mean	Result
Mathematics	58.91	54.02	Male higher
English	58.74	64.83	Female Higher
Science	60.12	57.39	Male higher

Mathematics: $t(200)=3.68$, $p<0.005$; English Language: $t(200)= -5.12$, $p<0.05$; Basic Science: $t(200)=2.14$, $p<0.05$.

As can be seen in Table 9, male students performed better in Mathematics with 58.91 and Science with 60.12, while female students outperformed males in English Language with 64.83 as against 58.74. These differences were statistically significant at 0.05 level, confirming gender differences in the students' academic achievements.

3.8 Discussion of Findings

This study examined gender disparities in educational participation and academic achievement among students in Abeokuta Metropolis. The findings showed that both male and female students participated actively in school activities, although differences existed in patterns of engagement. Female students were observed to have demonstrated higher class attention and assignment completion, while male students were more involved in extracurricular activities. Thus, this finding was in line with the position of World Bank (2020) that boys often conform more to masculine roles that devalue their education than girls in the school system. In terms of academic achievements, male students performed better in Mathematics and Basic Science, whereas female students excelled in English Language as was in the findings of OECD (2022) that boys tend to outperform girls in Mathematics and Sciences while girls were better in reading and literacy. The finding also confirmed the discovery of Ajoke, Bonny and Oyenike (2020) that girls often outperform boys in language-based subjects, while boys dominate in STEM fields. These gender disparities in subjects' performances in Nigeria were because boys are increasingly vulnerable to peer pressure, low reading culture and economic distractions (Chukwunweolu, et al., 2024). The study also revealed some socio-cultural gender perceptions like differences in domestic duties, cultural beliefs and gender expectations as major causes of gender disparities in education. This is in line with the submission of Eurydice (2019) that in countries where gender stereotypes are stronger, the gaps in Mathematics and reading achievement tend to be wider. On institutional practices, the outcome of this study showed that subject performances are also gender-biased as teachers' encouragement are lower even though schools highly support gender equity. This finding is also in line with the submissions of OECD (2020) and Eurydice (2019) that differences in academic achievements of boys and girls are also influenced by environmental and institutional factors such as curriculum designs and teachers' support.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that gender disparities in education are not due to differences in ability but are shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Although access to education may be the same but differences in participation and academic outcomes still persist. Achieving gender equity therefore requires addressing the underlying societal and school-based influences that shape students' experiences and learning outcomes.

5. Recommendations

i. Teachers should adopt gender-sensitive teaching practices that promote equal participation.
ii. Parents and communities should be sensitized to support both boys' and girls' education equally.
iii. Schools should encourage balanced participation in all subjects, especially STEM for girls and language subjects for boys.
iv. Government should strengthen the implementation of gender equity policies in education.
v. Financial support mechanisms should be provided to reduce economic barriers to schooling.

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