

**Perceptions of Nigerian Secondary School Students on the Socio-economic and Socio-cultural factors hindering Educational achievement: A Gender Focus.**

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**ABSTRACT**

**E**fforts have not been directed toward examining variations in the perceptions of both male and female students with regard to the socio-economic and socio-cultural variables underpinning secondary educational achievement. The study was, therefore, conducted to examine the extent to which the perceptions of both male and female students in Nigerian secondary schools differ with respect to the aforementioned factors. A validated questionnaire was administered to 504 respondents in 12 secondary educational institutions in Nigeria to ascertain their perceptions with respect to the socioeconomic and socio-cultural attributes. Results show amongst others, that there is no significant difference between the opinions of respondents with respect to the socioeconomic and socio-cultural factors limiting secondary educational achievement ( $t\text{-cal} = 0.38$  and  $0.44$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Keywords:** *Perception, socioeconomic factors, socio-cultural factors, secondary educational achievement*

## Introduction

A distinct relationship exists between education and socio-economic and socio-cultural developments because education is a key index of overall national development. The Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (2002) documented that, education improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life such as child labour as well as bringing about empowerment. Hence, secondary education builds upon the basic educational foundation which has been laid at primary education. The success of secondary education is dependent upon the foundation earlier laid, whether such was solid or not. It is contingent upon this that particular emphasis has been laid on basic education of all Nigerian citizenry.

Basic education made national and international communities and governments to agitate for the need to migrate from an educational system which is skewed towards gender disparity to one which is skewed towards gender parity. The dearth of gender disparity was so disturbing that its socio-enigma urged a Declaration of World Conference on EFA (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 that everyone-child, youth and adult should benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic needs (EFA, 2002). The World Summit for Children also held in 1990 re-emphasized that all children should have access to basic education by the year 2000 as well as increasing female literacy. Following the WCEFA, the Dakar World Education Forum was held where new sets of education goals were stipulated to be attained by the year 2015. The goals include, amongst others, ensuring that all children, especially girls, in difficult circumstances and from ethnic minorities have access and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality; eliminating gender disparities in pre-tertiary education by 2005, and migrating to gender parity in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls full and equal access to basic education of good quality. Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 reiterated the achievement of universal primary education and the promotion of gender parity and women empowerment respectively. Based on the developments, the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) and the Child Rights Act (2003) documented that Nigeria government shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age.

Nigeria has been committed to education in the belief that overcoming gender disparity will accelerate gender parity for national educational development. Despite her tendencies to equalize educational opportunities for boys and girls, there tend to be perpetual inequalities as many poor people are denied from educational processes and outcomes. According to Obadiya (2011), the girl-child contends with challenges like forced under-age marriages, girl-child labour and trafficking, displacements from armed conflicts as well as unhealthy cultural practices. In the same vein, children will not go to school because of cost of schooling, opportunity cost, illness and hunger, limited economic costs of education and low quality of schooling (ActionAid International, Nigeria-AAIN, 2003).

Despite international and national efforts to ensure a successful migration from gender disparity to gender parity of secondary school students, huge success has not been recorded. Evidence has noted that in Nigeria, governmental, non-governmental, private initiatives within and outside the frontiers of the nation for the northern states to embrace education has proved abortive (Mohammed, 2004). The number of girls attending schools in some northern states (Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara) of Nigeria is still abysmally low due to age-long religious and cultural beliefs, while the male child has a choice to attend, his female counterpart is strictly discouraged from obtaining the basic western education ([www.ungei.org](http://www.ungei.org)). There are still millions of girls without access to primary needless secondary education across the continent.

From these developments, it is obvious that, tremendous efforts have been directed toward closing the gap created by gender differences in education, but none have examined variations in the perceptions of both male and female students on the socio-cultural and socio-economic variables contributing to the social challenge of secondary educational underachievement. This forms the purpose of the study to determine the extent to which the perceptions of both male and female students in Nigerian secondary schools differ with respect to socio-economic and socio-cultural factors hindering effective educational achievement. Thus, the study was guided by the following research questions: (1) to what extent do the perceptions of male students differ from those of female students with regard to the socio-economic factors inhibiting effective educational achievement of students in Nigerian public secondary schools? (2) to what extent do the perceptions of male students differ from those of female students with regard to the socio-cultural factors limiting effective educational achievement of students in Nigerian public secondary schools? Two hypotheses were formulated and tested, viz: there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students with respect to the socio-economic factors inhibiting effective educational achievement of students in Nigerian public secondary schools,  $H_{01}$ ; there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students with regard to the socio-cultural factors limiting effective educational achievement of students in Nigerian public secondary schools,  $H_{02}$ .

### **Methods and Materials**

The study started in January and terminated in December 2011. The study was conducted with descriptive survey design which enabled the researchers to collect data from a sample considered to be representative of the entire population (Omorogiuwa, 2006). The sample possesses the characteristics peculiar to the whole population. The Federal Ministry of Education/Universal Basic Education conducted a school census in 2003 and consequently reported that the National Enrolment of Secondary Schools revealed that there is a total of 8648 public secondary schools in Nigeria and hence the population of the study comprised of 6136601 students made up of 2842264 males and 2621451 females (Nwangwu, Fagbulu, Aderogba, Ayuodele, Olapeju, Yusufu & Kalu, 2005).

The sample of the study consisted of 504 respondents. This was purposively selected by choosing two public secondary schools, each, from the six geopolitical zones (that is, North-Central, South-South, North-West, North-East, South- West and South-East), giving a total of twelve secondary schools. From the secondary schools, forty-two respondents each were selected using the simple random sampling technique, to obtain a total of 504 respondents consisting of 272 males and 232 females.

A twenty-seven researcher-made questionnaire was structured on the Likert format of the Four-Point Rating Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree). Scoring was done by assigning weights to the four points such as 4 for Strongly Agree, 3 for Agree, 2 for Disagree and 1 for Strongly Disagree. The items originated from literature reviewed as contained in the two research questions and these were intended to elicit information on the extent to which the perceptions of male and female students vary with respect to the socio-economic and socio-cultural attributes limiting the educational achievement of students in Nigerian public secondary schools.

The questionnaire was content validated by three experts, two from Health Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation. Their suggestions were incorporated into the instrument. The validated instrument was subjected to test-retest reliability in order to ascertain the reliability coefficient,  $r$  of 0.75. This means that the instrument was reliable.

Five research assistants were trained and employed to administer the instrument and collect data from the six geopolitical zones. The researchers personally gathered data from the South-South geopolitical zone. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation. The frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents while mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions. Then t-test statistics was used to test the two null hypotheses at an alpha level of 0.05 and degree of freedom of 502. The null hypotheses were not accepted if the t-calculated was equal to or greater than the t-critical value. For the research questions, items with mean score  $\geq 2.50$  were considered accepted and  $< 2.50$  were regarded rejected.

## Results

Details of the demographic characteristics of the respondents are as revealed in table 1.

**Table 1: Frequencies of Respondents according to their Demographic Characteristics**

S/N	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)	S/N	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	<b>Sex</b>			2.	<b>Present Class</b>		
	a. Male	272	54		a. JS 1-3	125	25
	b. Female	232	46		b. SS 1-3	379	75
	Total	504	100		Total	504	100
3.	<b>Age (in years)</b>			4.	<b>Religion</b>		
	a. 10-14	194	39		a. Christian	276	55
	b. 15-19	269	53		b. Islam	94	19
	c. 19 <sup>+</sup>	41	8		c. African Traditional Religion	22	4
	Total	504	100		Total	504	100
5.	<b>Ethnicity</b>			6.	<b>Father's Occupation</b>		
	a. Hausa	49	10		a. Farming	98	19
	b. Ibo	120	24		b. Trading	87	17
	c. Yoruba	75	15		c. Public service	128	26
	d. Others	260	51		d. Others	191	38
	Total	504	100		Total	504	100
7.	<b>Birth Position</b>			8.	<b>Father's Highest Level of Education</b>		
	a. 1 <sup>st</sup>	133	26		a. Primary	68	13
	b. 2 <sup>nd</sup>	101	20		b. Secondary	172	34
	c. 3 <sup>rd</sup>	99	20		c. Tertiary	237	47
	d. Others	171	34		d. None	27	6
	Total	504	100		Total	504	100
9.	<b>Mother's Occupation</b>			10.	<b>Number of Siblings</b>		
	a. Full housewife	59	12		a. Nil	13	2
	b. Trading	233	46		b. 2-4	190	38
	c. Farming	33	7		c. 5-7	190	38
	d. Public service	76	15		d. 8-10	69	14

	e. Others	103	20		e. 11 <sup>+</sup>	42	8
	Total	504	100		Total	504	100
11.	<b>Geopolitical Zones</b>			12.	<b>Number of wives owed by father</b>		
	a. South-South	84	17		a. One	310	62
	b. North-Central	84	17		b. Two	140	27
	c. North-West	84	16		c. More than two	54	11
	d. North-East	84	17		Total	504	100
	e. South-West	84	17				
	f. South-East	84	16				
	Total	504	100				

With the table 1, detailed analysis of the characteristics may not be required. Other results are presented in table 2-5, respectively, according to the research questions and hypotheses that guided the study.

**Table 2: Mean Responses on the extent to which the Perceptions on the Socio-Economic factors inhibiting educational achievement of students, vary between male and female students in Nigerian Public Secondary Schools.**  
(SD = Standard Deviation, Dec = Decision Level, A = Agree, D = Disagree)

S/N	Socio-Economic Factors	Males (N = 272)			Females (N = 232)			Overall (N = 504)		
		Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec
13	Frequency of eating	3.23	0.82	A	3.31	0.82	A	3.27	0.82	A
14	Possession of electronic gadgets	3.60	0.62	A	3.65	0.66	A	3.63	0.64	A
15	School fees paid regularly	2.84	0.97	A	3.41	0.88	A	3.13	0.93	A
16	Possession of learning materials	3.36	0.73	A	3.07	0.95	A	3.22	0.84	A
17	Assisting parents on farm	2.26	1.07	D	2.30	1.19	D	2.28	1.13	D
18	Selling after school	2.35	1.10	D	2.05	1.50	D	2.20	1.30	D

Table 2 presents the responses to the perceptions of male and female students on the extent to which Socio-economic factors inhibiting educational achievement, vary between them. The table shows that items 1-4 are rated 3.23, 3.60, 2.84 and 3.36 with standard deviation of 0.82, 0.62, 0.97 and 0.73 respectively for the male students while female students are scored 3.31, 3.65, 3.41 and 3.07 with standard deviation of 0.82, 0.66, 0.88 and 0.95 respectively. However, items 5 and 6 have low mean rating of 2.26 and 2.35 with standard deviation of 1.07 and 1.10 respectively for the males and females being 2.30 and 2.05 with standard deviation of 1.19 and 1.50 respectively. Both male and female students disagreed by perceiving that assisting their parents in farm work and to hawk items limit their educational achievement. With student agreeing with more of the items, it then entails that the educational achievement of both male and female students is hindered by socio-economic attributes.

**Table 3: Mean Responses on the extent to which the Perceptions on the Socio-Cultural variables limiting educational achievement, differ between male and female students in Nigerian public secondary schools.**  
(SD = Standard Deviation, Dec = Decision Level, A = Agree, D = Disagree)

S/N	Socio-Cultural Factors	Males (N = 272)			Females (N = 232)			Overall (N = 504)		
		Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec
19	Students suspected of immorality by parents	1.85	0.98	D	2.17	1.15	D	2.01	1.07	D
20	Parents encouraging students to attend school	2.66	1.13	A	2.84	1.10	A	2.75	1.12	A
21	Students intension to marry early after school	2.22	1.05	D	2.55	0.58	A	2.39	0.82	D
22	Students intending to stop formal education at secondary school	1.76	0.75	D	1.88	0.90	D	1.82	0.83	D
23	Parents coercing students into early marriage	1.85	0.90	D	2.06	1.03	D	1.96	0.97	D
24	Intending to study abroad after secondary education	2.93	0.98	A	2.79	1.08	A	2.86	1.03	A
25	Intending to travel outside Nigeria for green pasture	2.85	1.02	A	2.32	1.11	D	2.59	1.07	A
26	Religious and cultural hindrances	1.83	0.85	D	1.93	0.88	D	1.88	0.87	D
27	Pregnancy complications through immorality	2.47	1.03	D	2.25	0.99	D	2.36	1.01	D

The table above indicates the opinions of male and female students on the extent to which socio-cultural factors, hindering educational achievement, vary between them. Items 8, 12 and 13 have mean score of 2.66, 2.93 and 2.85 with standard deviation of 1.13, 0.98 and 1.02 respectively for the male students. Females rated items 8, 9 and 12 with mean ratings of 2.84, 2.55 and 2.79 and with standard deviation of 1.10, 0.58 and 1.08 respectively. However, items 7, 9, 10, 11, 14 and 15 have mean score below the criterion level of 2.50 indicating that both male and female students disagreed that their being suspected of immorality by their parents, and their religion and culture, amongst others hinder their educational achievement. With students disagreeing with more of the items, it then means that socio-cultural variables do not limit the educational achievement of male and female students.

**Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of the difference in Perceptions between mean scores of Male and Female Students on the Socio-Economic factors inhibiting educational achievement of Students in Nigerian public secondary schools (SD = Standard Deviation, DF = Degree of Freedom)**

S/N	Groups	No	Mean	SD	DF	Level of Significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
1.	Males	272	2.94	0.89	502	0.05	0.38	1.96	Not significant
2.	Females	232	2.97	1.00					

On Table 4, it is evident that the calculated t-value is 0.38 at 502 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value of 0.38 is less than the table value of 1.96, the  $H_{01}$  of the study is accepted. This entails that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between the perceptions of male and female students with respect to the socio-economic factors inhibiting their educational achievement in Nigerian public secondary schools.

**Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis of the difference in Perceptions between mean scores of Male and Female Students on the Socio-Cultural factors inhibiting educational achievement of Students in Nigerian public secondary schools. (SD = Standard Deviation, DF = Degree of Freedom)**

S/N	Groups	No	Mean	SD	DF	Level of Significance	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
1.	Males	272	2.27	0.97	502	0.05	0.44	1.96	Not significant
2.	Females	232	2.31	0.98					

Table 5 reveals that the calculated t-value of 0.44 at 502 degree of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is less than the critical table value. Since the calculated value of 0.44 is less than the table value of 1.96, the  $H_{02}$  of the study is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between the perceptions of male and female students on the socio-cultural factors that hinder their educational achievement in Nigerian public secondary schools.

## Discussion

Secondary education affords students with the knowledge and skills needed to be socially, economically and culturally successful as well as productive members of society. A successful secondary education is one that culminates into educational achievement that advances national development. In addition, such education promotes gender parity, through equal access of male and female students to formal secondary education.

Findings showed that secondary educational achievement can be hindered by socioeconomic factors but the opinions of both male and female students, with respect to these socioeconomic attributes, were not significantly different ( $t\text{-cal} = 0.38$ ). This finding supports a number of studies which have indicated that educational achievement can be limited by socioeconomic variables as reflected in gender disparities to the detriment of the girl child (Randell & Gergel, 2009; Alike &

Egbochukwu, 2009). None have assessed the opinions of both male and female students to determine the extent to which they are significantly different with respect to socioeconomic factors. To this end, both males and females perceived that socioeconomic factors affect their secondary education, but their opinions are not meaningfully significant ( $t\text{-cal} = 0.38$ ).

The major socioeconomic factor that constitutes barrier to effective and functional secondary education includes poverty. Poverty determines a student's parental socioeconomic status which borders on whether or not they can eat adequately; acquire school materials; pay for tuition and opportunity costs in terms of time spent in school (students assisting in farm work or street hawking). The assertion is concomitant with Herz and Sperling (2004); Alika and Egbochukwu, (2009) and Sutherland-Addy (2005). Herz and Sperling (2004) observed that direct and indirect costs of education are deterrents to sending girls to schools. Direct and indirect costs impinging on secondary educational achievement include school fees, uniforms, textbooks, transport, and the likes. As a result, poor parents find it difficult to make provision for their children's education and hence cannot benefit from secondary schooling. For socioeconomic reasons, a girl's family background may have a direct and important effect on educational attainment (Alika & Egbochukwu, 2009). According to Sutherland-Addy (2005):

*given the choice between sending a boy or a girl to school, families will prefer to send the boy to school for various reasons (opportunity costs, safety, and early marriage, cultural and social values). Girls are withheld from school to tend to younger siblings, to earn wages, to do household chores or farm work. These costs may be as important as or more important than the enrollment fees. In effect, it appears in some cases that it is not what the child must pay that is the problem; it is what they give up in the time involved in schooling. P. 43*

Findings also unveiled that secondary educational achievement cannot be hindered by socio-cultural factors but the opinions of both male and female students, with respect to these socio-cultural attributes, were not significantly different ( $t\text{-cal} = 0.44$ ). Socio-cultural factors that can hinder secondary educational achievement include early and forced marriages, search for green pasture, cultural and religious hindrances, immorality, pregnancy, and the likes. This finding is contrary to those of (Osakwe, Madunagu, Usman & Osagie, 1995; Mohammed, 2000; Sutherland-Addy, 2005; Kane, 2004). Osakwe, Madunagu, Usman, and Osagie (1995) observed that Nigerian girls, for various reasons bordering on religious, cultural, socioeconomic, historical and school related factors are not given a fair chance in the educational sector. Mohammed (2000) equally reported that a girl may be withdrawn from school if a good marriage prospect arises. Girls were taken out of school at ten or eleven because they were considered to be of marriageable age and had to be secluded from men and boys and taught the domestic skills they would soon need to contribute to their new households (Kane, 2004). Sutherland-Addy (2005) reiterated that:

*socio-cultural factors place a premium on the reproductive and domestic roles of girls and women. The girl child is made to assist her mother or female relatives in playing their domestic roles, and also makes transition into the adult role of wife, mother or producer of food and other economic goods and services. Her chances of completing secondary education are lost. Thus, girls have less incentive to persist through secondary education because of the gender roles associated with them and are not deemed to require high level skills or academic background. P. 53*



**Conclusion**

A successful secondary education is one that is free from gender disparities. It is a known fact globally, that both international and national attempts have been proffered to close the gap created by gender disparities. Suffice it to say that attempts have not been put in place to examine variations in the perceptions of male and female students with regard to the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors which can act as barriers to secondary education. Findings of the study, however, showed that the opinions of male and female students were not significantly different. Hence, the issue of gender difference is almost equally perceived by both male and female students as long as those factors affect their educational achievement.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, I recommend that parents should be economically empowered so that they can meet the economic needs of their children/wards, academically. To this end, school fees should be free to all levels of secondary education; free learning materials given to students will help to reduce the direct and indirect costs of secondary education.

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